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HAMMER MARKS

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A BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

By ARTHUR HOUGHAM

Author of "Gabriel Quelford"



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TO
MY FRIEND
DR. CYRIL R. LUNN, M.B.

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HAMMER MARKS

PART I

RUDYARD STREET

Chapter I

“ You are not to come in here, Arno.”

Her face shone pale in the darkness of the window through which she looked. Her voice was flexile and unguarded of tone, betraying, to one who cared to note, each fashion of her emotions ; not so her face ; it betrayed nothing, not joy nor sorrow, hope nor despair ; even her eyes were silent as to the battles of her heart. She lived in the blind-walled fortress of her reserve, which was something of a prison, but by her tell-tale voice her husband knew that there were fountains in its inner courtyard, and whether they flashed high enough to glint in sunshine or welled slowly and darkly away, he, Jeffry Brooke, her husband, knew the manner of them.

“ Arno,” she called again, with a wash of song in her voice ; such song as the breaking sea-wave throws to space.

Her son did not heed, even if he heard. He held a triangle of blue glass over a square of yellow and stared through them at the sun. Arnold Brooke was six years old, and when a boy is six in his years he appreciates a green sun as a change from the ordinary, everybody’s sun, which makes his eyes water when he stares at it through his finger-slots.

Arnold’s mother saw that he was far too interested in his own affairs to be likely to penetrate into her own, so she turned from the window. Then, remembering that she would require all the light which she could

obtain, she raked the cotton lace curtains back along their tape.

Arnold considered the mystery of the green sun for a minute before he dropped the glass trinkets to the heap at his feet. He picked up others of different colours and began to make absorbing experiments. He conducted these experiments with the puzzled seriousness of an alchemist, rather than the carelessness of a child who takes a toy, and takes a toy, and takes a toy.

"A green sun is silly," he announced, crossing and crossing his magic glasses. "The blue sun is the moon, but the red glass makes the sun white. What for? It ought not to look white," he reasoned. "It ought to look like one of the knots in the ash-house door, when you shut yourself in and the sun shines outside."

He would have liked to look at the knots in the ash-bin door through the red glass, and see what happened then; but the ash-bin was forbidden ground because of "sentry" and fever. He did not believe there was a sentry there, because he had watched for hours and had not seen one; but he knew the fever was there, because the big boys who brought him bits of glass from the tip, and who knew almost everything, had seen a gravestone, and on it the words: "*Miskin* door! *Miskin* door! Don't you open the *miskin* door, for that has brought me to my grave."

Arnold turned his attention to the house, scrutinising it through the ruby glass. His house looked *lovely*. It was twice as good as the other houses in the court, because they were the back houses, single houses; his was a double house. It was the best house in Rudyard Street; in all Birmingstow; in all the world. It was three times as good as the other houses in the court, because the front room was a shop, and it had a back-yard; none of the other houses in the court had a back-yard with a fowlpen in it. It was hundreds of times better; billion, million, trillion times better: a *lot* better!

And his father was a lot better father than theirs, each's, all of them's—only he had the toothache. His father was a gun action maker and had a workshop that

was as good as his own. A lot of men worked for him ; only his father had the toothache and his master would not let him work. His father used to get lots of money before he had toothache bad, so much bad. It hurt, only men did not cry like little boys as was hurt. Before he was bad, his father used to wash his Arnold in the big tin bath with peephole handles ; his mother washed him now at night ; his mother wore a hard ring and washed him as if she wanted to get him clean : his father washed him as if he loved his Arnold. Because his father was poorly, the boys brought Arnold bits of glass from the tip, and Mr. Rockby, who painted pictures with long brushes, let Arnold sit and watch him work in the "stewdy-io." He liked Mr. Rockby. But he loved his father.

Yes, he liked his house best through the red glass ; then it was almost as wonderful as when he bent and looked at it upside down from between his legs, with the sky running underneath it like the seaside on the posters.

Suddenly he had an inspiration ; he would look at the house upside down and through the red glass at the same time. Wasn't that funny ! He could not see the house at all ; he only saw what was behind him at the end of the yard—the fowlpen against the wall, the end of the general wash-house, and the round-faced iron tap like a baby weighing-machine. That was a good game the big boys played ; somebody stood on the sough to try their weight and pretended to put a penny in the slot, then another boy who knew the game would turn the handle and the water would come all over their feet.

Above the wall Arnold could see John Rockby's studio and the backs of the big houses in Athol Crescent. He thought that when he grew up he would like to be an artist and paint pictures like John Rockby. John Rockby's father was a doctor, but even then he was not as good as Arnold's father.

His attitude caused his head to swim. He straightened his back, and then sat down on the hard ground with his treasure enclosed in the V of his legs. In

addition to the shapes of coloured glass there were long edgings of Muranese glass discarded by stained window makers ; and scoops of mother of pearl, scalloped and fretted with round holes, from the button factory ; and bright snippings of scrap tin. Placing his coloured fragments side by side on the beaten ground he began to construct a great flower pattern, changing it and changing it with kaleidoscopic changes, until it was so big that he had to travel round it on hands and knees to place the last jewels on the winking points of the star. It gleamed a glorious, barbaric decoration in the drab court.

In the centre of the orderly spangles was a red glass disc intended for window lettering. Arnold crawled between the points of the star and picked the ruby out ; he took it on to the low roof of the fowlpen and began to spin it, making it skip in a dazzle of rays.

He was reminded of his tops ; how they pleased his father. Had his father not made wagers that no other boy could keep nine tops spinning so long as he upon a tin tray without them knocking ?

He made his way into the house. The kitchen was dingier than ever now that the naked window gave fuller access to the light. His mother was mixing a mash of linseed in a blue and white striped basin. The Turkey red table-cloth was half turned back, and there were scissors and rolls of bandaging and other forbidden play-things upon a flattened newspaper. His father had his hands above his head drawing a steaming cloth to his face ; he crossed the bandages and wrenched the hot dressing tightly to his cheek.

Arnold dragged his tray of tops and chinks from under the sofa, and, parting the fringe of the Turkey red covering, stretched himself in his favourite attitude upon his stomach. He lay half way from under the table with his tray upon the rag hearthrug ; he leaned upon his elbows while he tore bits of paper, and, moistening them, stuck them on the domes of some of the tops, to make coloured wings when they should be spun ; on others he made chalk marks, pink and blue.

Arnold looked up at his father to see if he were as interested as usual ; his father did not notice him.

To Arnold, in his lowly position, the man looked gigantic where he leaned in a sitting posture on the fire-guard ; his hands were a little way out from his side, holding the brass rail which formed the top of the guard ; a fire blazed at his back ; his head was as high as the opaque vases on the black wooden mantelshelf, but not so high as the fluffy pampas plumes arranged in them.

Arnold, looking upwards, saw his father's face from a new direction. The chin was more prominent, and was firmly modelled as a knee ; the clipped eaves of the brown-gold moustache showed him the dimpled lip which usually was hidden, and the pouches beneath the eyes showed fuller and more darkly blue ; perhaps it was because of the angle of Arnold's gaze or because his father was looking at the ceiling, but the man seemed to be bearing patiently great pain ; and Arnold loved him, loved him every bit.

"Are you ready for the next one, Jeffry?" asked Arnold's mother.

"Yes."

The man raised himself a little on the guard and, lifting his hands, unfastened the wrappings where they were knotted above his head, and lowered the festoon of bandages.

Arnold gave a piercing scream and buried his face in his arm among his toys. "Take him away! Oh, take him away!" he screamed in terror, lest anyone should touch him. In the hollow of his father's throat he had seen the livid cancer, seeming to be alive in the flickering firelight.

Arnold ceased to cry out and lay quivering, filled with fear. Oh, the horrible thing which was about in the house ; the horrible, the ugly, the terrible thing which had fastened on to his father. It had been in the house all the time and he had not known. He lay terrified with a pulsing, unqualified terror ; when he felt the touch of his mother's hand he nearly lost his senses in the dread that it might be the unnamable thing which

had been bound to his father ; the swollen thing without eyes which rippled with fluttering, flame-like life.

It was his mother who was lifting him ; her breast and shoulder were between him and his unhappy father's face ; she was carrying him up the dark staircase to his bedroom. He hid his face in her bosom and made his breaths with little jerky coughs. She was not taking him out of the terrifying house, for he could hear the loose handrail on the stairs rattle to her hold. He was to stop in the house with the awful silent thing which fluttered.

The bedroom was comfortingly lighter than the kitchen, but his mother had left the door open ; he ceased seeing, feeling ; he suspended every sense but hearing to listen for a sound on the dark staircase. There was no sound. Oh, his poor father alone below there with it, and no sound !

His mother laid him on the bed, his head upon the pillow, and began to unfasten his boots. Oh, why had she left the door open ? She kissed him and held his stockinged feet together in her hand—she had always liked to fold his feet together between her palms like this—but she did not stay ; she was going to leave him. He held out his two hands to her. She folded his hands in her palms even as she had fondled his feet ; her hands were warm and moist from the steam.

“ Be a brave man like father,” she said, and, drawing the coverlet over him, she left him, and he heard the grateful click of the closing door.

But the thing was flat ! It could come under the door and he would not see it ; he could not see the bottom of the door beyond the bed ! He hid under the bed-clothes, and abandoned himself to unmitigated terror.

He wanted to shrink and shrink right away so that nothing and no one but his mother would find him, and his mother could tell his father where he was when the thing had gone.

His mother had told him to be brave like his father was, but he knew he could not be brave, he could not help being a coward. He began to sob because he

could not be brave although he wanted to be ; his sobs began to form words, " I—want to be brave, I want to be brave." He pushed away some of the heavier coverings and whimpered, " Father, Arnie wants you. Father, Arnie wants you," and he glided to sleep.

The afternoon grew so grey that the sickle day-moon became distinct ; the forge-glow of sunset tempered it, and the night came, chilling it to steel ; still Arnold slept. Several times his mother came to see if he had wakened. She undressed him in his sleep and bathed his face, and put his white nightgown upon him ; last his father came and stayed a long, long while ; kneeling by his bed in the darkness, touching him with a quiet hand. He went away.

The moon rose higher, seeming transparent in its brilliance. Neither his father nor his mother came again to the room, but feet went often up and often down the stairs.

Arnold woke ; it was a kiss which had wakened him, a kiss among his hair.

" Father wants to see you." It was his mother's voice speaking.

Arnold was widely awake, so freshly and clearly awake. He climbed from the bed and found his mother's hand, and stepped with her to the door which was open, showing the light from his father's room across the little landing. There was a step down to the landing, and a step up into the room beyond ; Arnold carefully made the crossing.

His father's room was lit by an oil lamp upon a table of thin wood stained to imitate mahogany. To Arnold the room seemed well lit. He met his father's gaze as soon as he had passed the open door. He saw nothing else but his father. He did not wonder why he was wanted ; he only looked into those very beautiful grey eyes as he walked round the foot of the bed, and loved his father, and loved him, and loved him.

As the face of a gentle knight framed in a cowl of chain mail, the oval of his father's face was bound about with a capuchon of white linen ; a blanched, spent face,

made vivid by the light in the eyes, made tender by the soft curves of the lovable mouth in the shadow of the golden-red moustache.

His father held out his arms to him, and he went into them for a few very little minutes.

They kissed.

“ Good-bye, Arnold.”

“ Good-bye, father.”

The embrace opened, and Arnold moved from it. For a moment they told all their love, each to the other's eyes. Arnold felt a coin being placed in his palm ; his fingers closed over it ; the ritual was ended ; he had taken upon the tablets of his mind, indelibly, a picture of his father—a pale and golden knight.

Arnold took his mother's hand and went carefully from the room, carefully across the landing, and waited for her to lift him into his bed. He lay awake, but no thoughts came to blur the outline, and later, when he fell asleep, no dreams.

In the sparse moonlight the barbaric star which Arnold had made gleamed like a decoration in the dreary court;

Chapter II

ARNOLD grew into a boy of very glum aspect, and it may have been his joyless expression which warded off from him the fellowship of other boys of his own age, and caused him to lead a life strangely unchildlike in its friendlessness. As he approached the time when he would be leaving schooldays behind he began to feel this isolation, and it weighed upon and cramped his spirit. Books he did not care for, but he was happy with a pencil and paper or with tin boxes of paints, sitting in the small kitchen while his mother served in the shop, or did plain sewing for people of better circumstances who lived in the Crescent.

It had been eight years since his father died, but his mother, by means of the little shop, her needle, and much personal forgoing of comforts, had kept him well fed, well dressed, and provided with childish pleasures which Rudyard Street considered "waste, a sin and a shame."

"Why don't you go out and play the same as the other boys while the light nights are here? You'll wish you had when it's dark," his mother would ask, and he would rise obediently, leaving his pictures, to go and stand against the lamp-post at the corner, from whence he watched the children playing. He had a peculiar dread of his mother finding out that he himself did not play, but only stood and apathetically watched the games of others. He would wait until the children were called to their homes, or were dragged there, protesting loudly, when he would run back to his pictures, glad to be released by the late hour from the penance of play.

Sometimes the urchins invited him to share their

amusements, but always he shook his head. "He can't play cause he's a coward," they would cry, and as he backed away to the corner wall they would jeer and sing in chorus a doggerel verse, "Cowardy, cowardy custard! Can't eat a bit of mustard." He would regard them until they were tired and then return to his lamp-post position to consider the force and merits of their gibe and song.

He accepted their dictum that he could not play by reason of his being a coward. It never entered his head to question their summing up and judgment. Yet he was not shy, for he entered into any necessary intercourse with them without restraint. He was not reserved, for he thought they were rather fine fellows, these urchins of his own age. He was not sensitive, for he never avoided their ridicule. His lack of interest in games and fellowship was not occasioned by his being a weakling. This he tested secretly, running alone in less time the distances they raced, so many times round the square; climbing the lamp-posts, and throwing from the top of the street to beyond Bloom's Alley.

It became an established fact with them and him that he was a coward. During the impressionable years of ten to fifteen in his age his beliefs were instilled with the subtle aroma of his cowardice—beliefs which permeated his thoughts, his actions, his conscience.

That he did not fear physical pain did not affect his opinion of his cowardice; to be afraid of being hurt was only ordinary cowardice; his was something worse.

On a late September evening, when powdery chaff, dirty paper and vegetable refuse, and silt in the gutters made Rudyard Street look as if an open market had been held there, Arnold leaned against the corner lamp-post and knocked his heels on the curb and wished for night to come soon. With tame interest, as of one who watches a play seen many times before, he was looking at a group of boys cautiously approaching a house opposite him. The foremost urchin carried several jagged pieces of sheet glass, the others slunk close

at his heels, exhibiting stealth common to footlight villains.

The boy with the glass flung it at a doorstep, his companions of the moment thumped the house window as the glass crashed, and then all scampered to find hiding-places. The house door was snatched open and an elderly woman rushed into the street, followed by a man several years younger. She felt about the window-pane with the flat of her hand although she could see it was undamaged. She stooped to the shattered glass and picked scraps of it up.

"It must be the fanlight or one of the bedrooms Bert. Little imps!" she exclaimed.

Bert was more interested in seeking the perpetrators of the deed. He caught sight of Arnold, and, crossing the road, brought him unresisting to the scene of the jest. "Here's one on 'em," he said.

"No, it wouldn't be him, Bert. That's Mrs. Brooke's son, and he can't play."

"Can't play? He's a funny kid if he can't play. I never knew one yet."

"No. When his mother was carrying him they found out her husband had a cancer and would die, but it went dormant."

"D'you mean he's a bit touched?" asked Bert.

"No, I don't. He's as smart a kid as there is in the street, but he don't know how to enjoy himself."

"Poor little devil! I suppose if his father had cancer he'll have it?"

"Nothing so sure. It's always handed down."

"You'll frighten the kid," said Bert, forgetting that he had instigated the remark.

"Not me; he's too young to know what we're talking about."

"What is a cancer?" asked Arnold.

"It's a silver new nothing to wear on your sleeve. You run off while you are safe."

Arnold walked gravely to the little shop. He went into his bedroom and fumbled in the dark for his dictionary. He could feel which it was as it had no cover. He

brought it down, and, spreading it on the table, found the page he sought.

"A genus of crustaceans ; one of the twelve zodiacal signs ; the sign of the summer solstice ; a malignant tumour."

The whole explanation as set forth served to deepen the mystery ; six of the words were strange to him. He began to look them up in the book.

"What are you looking for?" enquired his mother.

"Solstice," said Arnold, who had progressed thus far.

"What do you want it for?" she asked.

"It came in a lesson at school to-day," he answered.

"Now why did I tell that lie?" he asked himself.

"I suppose it's because I'm funky, and I always shall be."

"Mr. Rockby has started teaching at the School of Art," said his mother, "evenings as well."

"I know," said Arno.

"Should you like to go to the School of Art and be in his class?"

Arnold thrust the book aside at this suggestion.

"Oh, that would be lovely," he said.

"Go and wash your face then, and wait at the corner of the Crescent until he comes. He is sure not to be long now."

"But I did wash my face this morning," protested Arnold.

"Then wash it again," said his mother. "You've got lots of time."

Cleaned and brushed, Arnold walked through the little shop into Rudyard Street. Rudyard Street after dark revealed to the full the marrow of its sordid misery. When lamps and candles were lit, old sacks and pieces of faded rag fastened across the lower windows served to attract inquisitive attention to what was not hidden in the living-rooms, and but little was hidden above table-level. But if the inquisitive attention was a stranger's, he glanced through no more than one window, for with concerted disapproval the whole population of

the street appeared menacingly at doorways and windows and the entrances of courts, gathered by feeling in general the contagion of a common itch. Rather than method it was a law none analysed which governed the swiftness to communicate between and the readiness to co-operate of all the corpuscles crowding in the arteries of Rudyard Street.

So Rudyard Street had lit its lamps and made a sneering pretence at privacy with rags and old newspapers, and then had put bricks against wide-open doors and lit more dripping tallows in the bedrooms, that it might wash and eat, dress and undress, quarrel and cook, in comfortable publicity.

It was Thursday night, and there was scarcely any money in Rudyard Street pockets; the "Rose and Crown" and "The Why Not Inn" had little spittle on their sanded floors. The men lolled against walls, finding ease and satisfying their vanity by the height to which their shirt-sleeves were rolled; their hands were ever roving, on pipe-stems or in the covert depths of their flap pockets. The women who had babies sat on doorsteps and suckled them, those who had not fidgeted with their fingers in their hair or their blouses. The whole of the visible population was watching the excited manœuvres of various mongrel dogs. Arnold also watched the dogs, since, bred of Rudyard Street, he was becoming to have one eye, one mind, one appetite with the denizens thereof. To lose initiative and sacrifice personality apart from the whole body's personality was the lot of a corpuscle of Rudyard Street.

He turned at the corner by the "Rose and Crown" and waited where John Rockby must pass to reach Athol Crescent.

As Rudyard Street was the edge of the slum area, so was the Crescent the edge of a good-class district, its rampart which defied the undesirable.

As Arnold saw John Rockby approach he raised his cap and said, "Good evening, Mr. Rockby." Then he had to slip quickly aside to avoid being jostled by the man, who did not alter his pace as he passed. Arnold

looked at the broad back. A quiver ran through him, beginning at his heart.

John Rockby pushed open the iron gate with a thrust of his knee and went up the stone steps between the shrubs. He knocked the ash from his pipe upon one of the pillars, and, taking a latch-key from his vest pocket, let himself into the hall. The cradled light in the hall showed round his broad back with ochre glow for a moment before the door closed. Arnold looked at the door as he had looked at the man's back—with an empty mind, with an empty heart.

He walked toward Rudyard Street, and stopped as his mind definitely resumed its action. "Perhaps he did not see it was me," he thought, and slowly turned and retraced his steps to the gate. His hand was between the spikes; he hesitated. "Perhaps he saw it was me only he is bothered and did not want to stop and myther with me." He dropped his hand to his side and turned again. He now walked as far as the "Rose and Crown" before he changed his thought. "I did not speak very loud; he might not have heard me: No, I did not speak loud."

A boy with a jug of beer came out of the outdoor department of the "Rose and Crown." He kicked a stone at Arnold, and said casually, as if from force of habit, "Cowardy, cowardy custard."

Arnold hesitated, and then walked the way he had come. A little more animation came in his tormentor's voice as he cried, "Er—coward, run away." But, seeing that Arnold ignored him, he stroked the froth off the beer with his finger and drew it up his nose.

This time Arnold lifted the knocker of Dr. Rockby's house before a new and arresting thought possessed him. "If I've only come back because Harry Jenks called me a coward I am still a coward, only I am scared of Harry Jenks instead of John Rockby." He lowered the knocker.

"I'd sooner be scared of Rockby than Harry Jenks," he thought. "Besides, it's late, and he would be at

supper." Glad that his indecision was ended, he ran on his way back to the shop.

His mother looked up as he dropped the counter-flap with a bang and raced into the kitchen. "Well, have you had a nice long chat with Mr. Rockby?" she asked.

She had a pair of scissors in her hand, cutting a piece of cloth on the table to the measurement of brown paper shapes pinned to it.

"This for me?" asked Arnold, fingering the cloth. "Is it all of a suit or only a jacket?"

"A suit," she said. "I can't send you among gentlemen's sons without making you decent." She paused a minute for his silence to prove if what she thought was so, was so indeed. She made a line with a piece of soap and asked, "What did Mr. Rockby say?"

Arnold swallowed with difficulty.

"He was having his supper," he said. "I've got to see him when he's finished. I'll go now."

"And Arnold."

"Yes, mother?"

"I think I should call him 'sir.'"

"I think I will; he's a gentleman really, mother, isn't he?"

"You'll see," said Mrs. Brooke. "You've got the poke of your cap to the back of your head."

Arnold twisted his hat round, and with reluctant steps went into the street.

A maid opened Dr. Rockby's door in answer to Arnold's peal of the bell.

"If you please, miss, can I see Mr. Rockby? I don't mean the doctor," asked Arnold.

"Don't pull the night-bell next time," she said.

"I will enquire." She closed the door, and Arnold stood first on one leg and then on the other until she returned.

"What do you want to see him about?" she asked, on returning.

"It's about the night school, please, miss," said Arnold, screwing his cap like a window leather. She closed the door again.

When the door opened, John Rockby stood there.

He overhung the step and peered at Arnold. "Oh, it's you," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Mother thought, sir," said Arnold, with queer distances in his voice, "that I should like to come to the School of Art for nights and that you would look after me best in your class."

"There is a nearer School of Art," said John Rockby resentfully. "I am at the Central. Why don't you go to Mallard Street?"

"But that is only a board school turned into one for the evenings, without proper things—sir," protested Arnold, gathering those forces of aplomb which had been disbanded by long disassociation from Rockby.

"There's a branch school in Molesey. That is a day and evening art school. It's provided for cases like yours. Why don't you go there if you want one nearer?"

"But I don't. I want you to learn me, sir."

"Well, under any circumstances you could not be under me every evening. Pupils have to take several classes decided on by the principal."

Arnold's tone, which had been all eagerness, became deliberate with purpose, and his expression was steadfast in its alertness. "They would give me a pass at school, while I am there, for the Central; if I see the principal he would give me at least two nights a week in your class out of the five."

John Rockby's voice also changed, and changed still more as he went on speaking; changed as old honey candying to sugar. He put his hand on Arnold's shoulder. He smiled his broad-lipped smile, by which one saw the lower teeth overlapped the others.

"How old are you now, Arnold?" he asked.

"I'm fourteen. I am leaving school soon," said Arnold, his mind running on in front to forestall the other's intention.

"Oh, I thought you were older, sonny," said Rockby, with a ripe pout of his great lips. "That alters everything. Your mother must not dream of sending you all the way to town every night."

"I can get on the tram to town ; I shall have to walk across to Molesey."

"Yes, but that is not like town ; town is not a nice place for little boys. You tell mother what I say." He raised his athlete's knee, and, putting it in Arnold's chest, gave him a big-manly, brotherly shove with it as he released his shoulder.

"I shall be having to go to town every day to work," said Arnold, but the door was closing.

Mrs. Brooke was tacking the pieces of cloth together when Arnold arrived at the shop.

"Well?" she said, with brightness.

"Rockby's a good sort, isn't he, mother?" said Arno, flinging his cap on to the couch.

"Is he?" said his mother. "What's he been saying?"

"He thinks I'm not old enough to risk going into town at night and I'd do best to go to the branch school at Molesey."

"Should you like that as well, Arnold?"

"I'd like it, and it might be as nice after all," said Arnold.

"Take your coat off. Let me try this shape on you now it's basted," she said.

He slipped off his coat. "Mother," he said suddenly.

"What? And hold still," she said, mumbling because of the plan in her mouth.

"I wish boys would not say Rockby was no good. It makes me wonder until I see him, then I forget everything but what a fine chap he is."

"You are growing up," said his mother, pulling round the armhole.

"What, have you cut it too short?" he asked, apprehensively.

"No, it's plenty long," she said. Then, as Arnold yawned, "You're tired, aren't you? Kiss me good-night down here to-night, to save mother coming upstairs ; she's so busy."

In the morning, when she brought him a cup of tea to his bedside, she carried also the unfinished trousers

and coat, with one sleeve attached. "Try these on before you dress for school," she said.

"Mother, how grey you are," said Arnold, his hand beneath the saucer.

"No, I'm not ; I have hardly any grey hairs."

"I didn't mean your hair," he said, and paused in his speech to blow steam from the cup. "Shall you have the clothes done in time for me to-night?"

"I ought to. I've been working on them all night. I am going to try to get forty winks before I open the shop."

A repeated knocking was heard on the shop door. "Oh, there's somebody started pummelling ; I shall have to open the door." She went to the window, flung up the sash, and leaned out. "I'm coming," she called, and let the sash glide down. "Put them on carefully while I go down, 'cause some of it's only basted ; and don't jig."

As Arnold wormed himself into the clothing he began to bawl unmusically the words of his poetry lesson :

"Up from the meadows rich with corn,
Clear on that cool September morn——"

The suit was ready by the time Arnold returned from afternoon school. Beside it on the sofa was a satin bow tie, the colour of a blue-bottle's body, made up on a moon of cardboard with a loop of elastic on the back which twanged and went "plunk" over his collar-stud when it was put on.

The touch of new seams always made Arnold self-conscious. As he stood at the door of classroom J, which the headmaster of the Molesey School of Art had told him to regard as his workroom for the session, he whisked his shoulders and patted his tie before knocking. There was a sound of movements beyond the door, but it was not opened. He knocked again and listened. He heard the neighing of a horse and the crowing of a cock.

The door opened, and a red-haired youth came out,

pulling the door after him. He began to walk down the corridor.

"Please——" said Arnold appealingly.

"Do you want me, bluebottle?" demanded the youth.

"If you please, I want to go into classroom J. The headmaster——"

"Well, then, go in!" cried the youth, turning the door-knob and giving Arnold a push which sent him sprawling into the room beyond. Arnold remained crouching for a moment, bewildered by what he saw. In the same attitude as himself, but facing him, was a goat. The goat lowered its head threateningly, but Arnold still gazed at it in stupefaction. A small piece of brick struck the goat on the haunch and caused it to turn its attention to the missile, which it began to eat nonchalantly.

Arnold blushed furiously; he suspected that he was being baited; but when he rose there was no jeering. The students were apparently accustomed to seeing a strange boy hurtled at the animal they were sketching; their eyes glanced at either their drawings or the goat.

"Do you mind moving slightly, so that I may see the subject," drawled a pensive voice from behind Arnold. "Perhaps you had better come outside the ring, as you might intercept someone else's view."

Arnold saw that the speaker was the red-haired youth. The boy made his way between desks to the door and examined his surroundings. This was not like an ordinary school: he could not see the teacher, yet everyone was working. The room was a long, wide hall, and there were live animals tied to rings in the floor, and live birds in cages; fowls, ducks, and magpies. A great coloured fountain of a peacock was chained by the leg to a stand. The students spoke quietly as they worked. There was no teacher's desk raised high; there was a teacher! She rose from beside a pen of guinea-pigs and looked round at her charges with a satisfied glance. She saw Arnold by the door and raised a beckoning finger. She was a rosy-cheeked

little lady, and Arnold in his boyishness thought her old.

He handed her the slip of paper which the headmaster had given him.

"You will need to buy a board, and some paper and pencils," she said, "but I will lend you some for to-night. Should you like to draw doves? They keep rather quiet; the other things are never still."

She took it for granted that he would, and led him to the far end of the room, where, in a pen, were two ring doves dozing on a perch. The pen was on a table in a corner with only one desk before it, and while he waited he examined the other student seated there.

She was a girl but little older than Arnold himself. She wore a dress of smooth, dark-brown cloth, cut in a sweep around the shoulders, from which her neck rose, creamy and curved. Her hair was the brown of a horse chestnut glossy from the burr. It was tied with a winged bow and waved in a coil over the back of her chair. She continued studiously at her work, so that he saw only the dimpled line of her cheek and the length of her lashes; but he noted that the cream of her skin flushed to pink on her cheeks, as does the pastel colour on the concave petals of certain roses.

He glanced at her work. She was painting the doves in water-colour. Little tubes and artist's pans were before her, and he observed that she did not moisten her brushes as he did. The mistress returned and laid a hand upon the desk.

"Put your name on the top of the paper and draw the birds as well as you can, and I will come later and see how far advanced you are," she said.

"Yes, miss," said Arnold. "Please, miss, may I speak?"

"Yes. What do you wish to say?"

"I mean, may I talk like the others?"

"If you will discuss your work only and not interrupt anyone you may."

"May I talk to the girl who is painting the doves?"

Many little wrinkles suddenly began to twinkle round the eyes of the little art mistress. "I will ask," she said, and addressing the girl with the autumnal hair, she said, in a voice where amusement was well hidden, "Miss Sard, have you any objection to conversing with a new student while you are working?"

The girl laid her quill-like brushes in a china tray of water and rested her hands upon her sketch, palm upwards and one upon the other. Arnold had never noticed hands so beautiful before; these looked to him as if they had done nothing but beautiful actions since they were little baby hands. They were not purely white; they suggested the pink and semi-transparency of pomegranate seeds. She tilted her small, valiant chin, and her glance comprehended Arnold as it passed to the waiting art mistress. To Arnold her eyes were a revelation of how beautiful brown eyes could be. Until now, all the eyes which he had loved to steep his gaze in had been grey.

"We have not been introduced yet," she said, stressing the words as a request. Her voice was not the voice of the girls of Rudyard Street—the voice itself was different. Without explaining his meaning to himself, he called their voices "hairpin voices"; but the voice of the picture-painting maid was like that of the one choir-boy who was listened to although all the others were singing.

Arnold began to be alarmed by the ceremonious ritual involved in his introduction to this girl. In Rudyard Street, if a boy wished to be acquainted with a girl he pulled her plait as she passed; if she squeaked or slapped his face he had "clicked"; if she ran and told her irate mother he had "touched unlucky."

"Miss Bennetta Sard, may I introduce Mr. Arnold Brooke?" announced the smiling little art mistress.

Arnold clung to the back of the chair, wondering what pack of formalities he had caused to be unkennelled.

Bennetta Sard rose and turned the full magic of her artlessness upon the boy. He knew that there was one, and but one, correct thing which he should do or say;

not knowing what it was, he wondered why they did not give lessons at school in this kind of thing, and was gracelessly silent and motionless.

"Arnold Brooke, allow me to introduce Miss Bennetta Sard. I do not hold with teachers having favourites, but Miss Sard is my most promising pupil."

Bennetta Sard inclined her head as slightly as a delicately poised brown lily which moves although the night is calm. Arnold slowly and with infinite gravity made his first bow, the bow of a highwayman, who until he received an angel visitor had restrained all other guests with a horse pistol.

"And now romance has had its quota," said the mistress. "You must commence work. No, do not lie upon the board so ; you will become round-shouldered. Let the light fall upon your pencil point. That is much better."

Although permission was granted, Arnold did not address the girl. He became absorbed in his task. When the doves moved their positions slightly to rub their beaks together he balanced his pencil and regarded the girl's painting until the doves were as before. He was glad that he had been placed beside a girl—no, by this girl ; for, faithful to the opinions of his years in his sex, he thought most girls were silly. His association with boys had taught him to expect but little understanding from them, and left him unimpressed by friendship or companionship, and so prepared him at an early age to receive the imprint of a love virgin and fervent.

It was Bennetta Sard who first spoke. She said, "Granny likes these pictures of birds better than any others of my sketches."

"Do you mean the teacher ?" asked Arnold.

Bennetta Sard regarded him for a moment. "No, I meant my grandma," she said.

The boy resorted to safe silence and looked at the doves. The girl began to collect her little trays and to wash them in a black pan of water which was placed upon a window ledge.

Arnold regarded with concern these preparations for flight. "Are you going already?" he asked.

"Yes. I only stay for an hour in the evenings, but I attend every evening."

The art mistress came to take and examine Bennetta's sketch. "Why, Bennetta," she exclaimed, "you have painted the dove with a green eye! You have never made such a mistake before. Pink, Bennetta, pink."

Bennetta flushed, and as she leaned over the board rubbed her finger upon the bird's eye as if to efface the error. Arnold stubbed his pencil through the paper into the board. He saw that the eyes of the painted bird were green, with a shiny green which he knew. His own eyes were green—that green.

Chapter III

OH, the queer, mad, paltry, princely thoughts and fancies which troop across the brain of a youth who is much alone ! Not only the variety of the thoughts amaze, but their numbers amaze by their host. Into a minute are crowded many. Into the day and the week and the month press how many more ? And then again, for a week, a month, one unimparted thought, uncouth and cumbersome, will occupy the brain like a poisoned snail swollen too greatly to escape its shell.

And Arnold Brooke was much alone during his lesser youth. From when he left school and began to be a wage-earner, until months after his sixteenth birthday, his days were spent in pushing a builder's handcart from one given point in Birmingstow to another ; his native city provided his feet with a bastinado ; apparently his deserts for being strong and healthy and apparently patient in art.

He had been attracted to Vibert's, the house painters who now employed him, by seeing in their fine showroom window examples of church and theatre decoration which purported to indicate their class of business. The showroom ceiling portrayed a summer sky from which fat infants, doubtless intended for wingless cherubs, appeared to be on the point of dropping on customers' heads. The walls were hidden by doors, on the panels of which were more babies, holding moons and walking on flower-stalks. Schemes of decoration were displayed on easels.

When the time had come for Arnold to seek a situation his mother had asked John Rockby for advice.

"It is so difficult, Mr. Rockby," she had said, "for a woman—and an old woman at that—to know what to

put her son to for the best. If his father had been spared he'd have looked round for him when he saw this time coming, and marked a path for him. A child wants a mother more than a father, but now that has come a time for him to go out into the world I wish he'd been left with a father instead of me, since it had to be at all. I have not anyone to look to for advice, and as you took an interest in him at one time I thought you would understand him a bit. He's different to other boys ; I expect it's him having no father. He thinks a lot of your opinion, so I thought if you could suggest what I could put him to"—she raised her veil to look at John Rockby ; she wore her jet beaded bonnet for this visit—" or if you could recommend him to somebody who could do with a boy as is clever at drawing, I thought perhaps you would not mind my asking."

John Rockby had frowned in thought.

"I did not know if firms ever sent to the art school for apprentices?" she added.

"If they do they want them artcled and pay no salary," he had said, partly closing his eyes as he faced the dilemma.

"I could not keep him nice without any as he grows up. I do not mind only a little for a year or two if it's for his good. I thought your recommendation would go a long way. He's written after heaps and heaps of places, but it's having nobody behind him, and I think Rudyard Street address is against him."

"In my opinion"—here John Rockby's brow had cleared—"a boy always makes his way best in the world by following his own bent——"

"His bent is drawing in any shape or form," Mrs. Brooke had interposed.

"And if grown-ups interfere they often put stumbling-blocks in the youngster's path. If I were you, Mrs. Brooke, I should send him out to get work, and you will see that he will find his own level."

Mrs. Brooke had sighed and said as she rose, "Thank you, Mr. Rockby. I knew that you would put me right. There's another thing I wanted to thank you for.

Arnold's heart is set on being an artist, and I think it will keep him out of wild ways as he grows up, just as it's kept him to himself and different from the other lads in the street. They know almost as much as grown men for wickednesses. It's only you that's put drawing and suchlike into Arnold's head."

John Rockby had made a disparaging movement, at the same time allowing himself to appear confused. "Oh, it's nothing to be an artist, Mrs. Brooke."

"I know it isn't, but it keeps my lad from going wrong and being unmanageable; that's a lot to a mother, and I want to thank you. I'm going now, but thank you for Arnold's sake as well."

So Mrs. Brooke had bought a street guide of Birmingstow for Arnold, and had sent him forth with a packet of bread and meat, and money for a newspaper, tram fare, and a cup of tea.

There was no "Boy, with artistic tendencies, leaving school," wanted that day, and he, feeling that his plight was hopeless, had applied for and obtained a post as an errand boy. But little elated, he had returned to Rudyard Street, to hear that his mother would not let him go, as the work "led nowhere."

Satisfied with his mother, he had sallied forth again, looking for notices on office, warehouse, and factory doors, and it was then that he had seen Vibert's prize infants.

Arnold had not acted on his first impulse of rushing into the shop and offering his services. He carefully examined the schemes of decoration, and, returning to Rudyard Street, asked for money to buy hot-pressed paper, having bought which he returned to his upstairs room, which he called his studio since the time when he had moved his bed and chest of drawers into the smaller room over the scullery.

He set to work and drew with such pains as he had taken on no other drawing a scheme of decoration for a music-room. He took the outline to the School of Art, and, without revealing his purpose, received advice as to colouring it. It took him three days of continual

work to complete to his satisfaction, and then, trusting to chance that Vibert's had a vacancy, he took it to the office, laid it face downwards on the enquiry counter, and boldly asked where he could find Mr. Vibert.

An office girl with protruding teeth said she could not say, as he had been dead for years.

"I have come about work. Who do I ask for?"

"Mr. Button. You'll find him in the baby farm."

"Where's that, miss?" asked Arnold.

"The place with cupids on the ceiling. Here, take your malting food advert. with you."

Arnold snatched his precious painting, feeling a little disturbed. He found Mr. Button in the showroom and handed him the scheme for a music-room, saying, "If you please, Mr. Button, this is some of my work and I want a situation."

Mr. Button put the edge of the picture to his lips, by which means he proceeded to whistle a suggestion of a tune.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

The question which Arnold wished to come last, coming first, disconcerted him completely.

"Fifty-eight Rudyard Street," he said, in a thin voice.

Mr. Button did not show emotion. He nodded and said, "Come to the yard at seven to-morrow morning and you can make a start. I'll pay you four-and-sixpence a week to start."

Arnold had gone to the yard at seven o'clock on the following morning; a handcart had been given him to wheel to a row of villas on the outskirts of Birmingham, and since then for nearly three years he had made daily perambulation through Birmingham, round and about Birmingham, pushing or pulling, as the load went easier, the same or a similar handcart. The workmen called him the "traffic manager," and liked him.

He made a protest at the end of his first week's employment, and was informed that he was to learn the trade all the way through, to begin at the bottom and work his way up. By the end of the second week he had discovered that Vibert's had no artistic work of any

kind ; that the mural decorations in the showroom were relics of an earlier owner of the business. By the end of the month he saw that he was too useful as a beast of burden to be appreciated as an embryo artist.

His working hours during the summer months were from six o'clock in the morning until such time as he was no longer required at night, which was never earlier than eight o'clock and usually near ten o'clock, as it was the custom of the trade for the workmen to work every moment of daylight during the busy season's rush in the hopeless endeavour to retrieve what was lost in the financial débâcle occasioned by the disheartening slack season. Many as Arnold's working hours showed on his time sheet, the time sheet was no criterion, for he booked his time from whichever job he had taken materials to overnight to whichever job he took a load to in the evening. Vibert's class of trade, being cheap cottage work, was spread over the whole area and suburbs of Birmingstow, which meant that Arnold dragged himself, dazed from the paralysis of sleep, at four o'clock or even dawn, and at night reached Rudyard Street again when the "Rose and Crown" was ejecting its sots.

He never knew what his mother thought on those summer evenings as she locked the shop door after him. Ashamed of his daily routine, he led her to believe he was making great progress in his work. He would drop into the spindle-backed chair too weary to eat his supper, and begin to doze, so sick with tiredness that he allowed her to unlace his boots.

He endured the cursed summers—when the sun blistered the paint on his handcart—because working hours were not so many in the winter, and he could then get to the School of Art three or four nights out of five in the week. He endured the whole year in the trade since, spite of letters and stolen interviews, he could get no artistic employment.

When he grumbled to the workmen they would tell him that he was lucky to be in regular employment, and that things were not so bad as when they started in the

trade ; wages were better. Arnold was born on the day that Birmingstow was made a city, and he was now in his sixteenth year. By means of overtime he sometimes received fourteen shillings when he was paid on Saturdays.

Oh, the fierce, vehement thoughts which lashed his intelligence with thongs of truth as he thrust the handcart forward with his thighs and gripped the handles which were worn and polished with his fingers—his artist's fingers.

This trade, which was no occupation but only a feverish upheaval of a dispassionate section of labour for a few of the better months of the year and then a dragging, scarce visualised makeshift for a minor number of its followers until the busy season recurred, what was the value of it as a trade to a man who married and wanted children? From April to June a scrambled diving for bits of work ; from June to August-end a rabid round of toil, with pounds which seemed bountiful after the dearth of pence ; and then September, when the work dribbled down and down until there was work for only the minority during the winter months till the spring.

And the men, what did it make of them ? How could such a precarious existence—comparative prosperity fluctuating with actual poverty—make royal the human character ? Oh, he had watched them. How they drivelled and were piteous in the winter months, and with the coming of the setting-in of the annual prosperity how they were arrogant and inflated by the rattling in their pockets and the knowledge that they could get work anywhere, that there were not enough painters to go round ; how they bought gay clothing and were silken of sock, and had merry nights—and they were right to be merry, for had they been starving with thrifty forethought, six months' wages would not have supplied the year.

Yes, they were right to live for the moment, but they were not right when the work began to fall off to drop their arrogance so suddenly, to seek by stealthy

device and conspicuous cunning to be the ones who should have the licks of work which yet should dribble among them.

A man needed to be made of something else than clay to resist such recurring tides of poverty. He, Arnold Brooke, would become the same as they were—a slinking creature of self-pity for seasons, alternating with seasons when he would be a blown, reckless upstart, whose only trust was in a good winter's work coming, and each time as he should see the work falling off he would sneak and lie and cheat to be kept at work another month, another week, a couple of days. Yes, he would grow like them. He felt that since they all were the same it was not to be escaped. How did he know what a hard winter followed by a good season and then another hard winter would make of him—unless he could get out of the trade, unless—— *There was no way out!*

It was on an August noon that he pushed the hand-cart. His load was a bosh of powdered lime, balanced above the axle, and so often as a stone jolted the wheel, so often the biting powder rose in a puff and made his nostrils wince and his eyes smart. He allowed the perspiration to trickle where it would, making his collar limp. His shirt had risen and was rucked under his armpits, causing him varying discomfort, but his thoughts continued to run in the channel of their main theme, despite minor currents.

The winters would be the worst times to him when he grew up, but as yet they were not so bad; he looked forward to them. He wondered if art would ever show him a way of escape; if he did any good by giving all his scanty leisure to it, or if he attended the art school so assiduously only because he met Bennetta Sard there, brown eyed, quiet voiced, gentle Bennetta Sard; but for whom he would not have known that his youth was youth.

How tactful she was; how she lacked inquisitiveness; how she made him admire her sex. What a little she revealed of her life. He feared to ask even

her address lest in courtesy he should be expected to reveal his own, or the manner of his occupation !

He wondered when the fearful day would come when some student at the Central Art School, where both now attended, should see him at his humble duties and betray him to Bennetta Sard.

This thought pricked him with alarm ; he flinched as the probability of its fulfilment occurred to his mind.

He was passing through Broad Row, which is one of the central ducts of Birmingstow. He looked round as if fearing this to be the actual moment of discovery.

No one was regarding him except a man on the step of the Paintplex Decorating Company. Arnold met the man's glance ; the freemasonry of the trade made it incumbent for one " brother brush " to acknowledge another if their dress or occupation of the moment proclaimed them to be such. Arnold, seeing that the man was apparently an employer, was shifting his glance but the man nodded. Arnold nodded with customary trade civility and looked at the window, where was pinned a notice such as was to be seen on most house painter's entrance gates at that time of the year :

PAPERHANGERS WANTED.

Several Good Brush Hands.

Also Improver.

" Want a job ? " asked the man.

" Looks as if I've got one, don't it ? " laughed Arnold with the rough pleasantry expected.

" Thought you might like a change," said the man.

" Wrong time of the year to change ; almost the end of the season," said Arnold, lowering the handles to the gutter. " I am certain of a winter's run where I am."

" So are you here if you are any good. We can always find something to do in the yard for a young chap."

" I've had enough of being ' the yard dog ' where I am," said Arnold, picking up the shafts of the hand-cart again.

"That's all right ; we've got a yard man as it is."

"I'll think about it," said Arnold, moving away.
"Good day."

He did think about it, about that and the knowledge that he would perform his present duties in constant alarm now that he had once thought of someone reporting to Bennetta Sard that he was what he was—"Vibert's traffic manager," "Mercury," "Lightning," "The handcart-shover de luxe."

Arnold arrived at his destination. It was a pretentious villa in Edgbastham, the most superior residential suburb of Birmingham. He went to the tradesmen's entrance and rang the bell.

"Want the foreman painter?" said the maidservant who opened the high gate. "Go through that door and along the passage to the drawing-room." A suit of armour stood on either side of the drawing-room door. "He's in there," called the girl. "Go straight in."

Arnold opened the door. Facing it in the room were long French windows with a lawn and a border of carnations beyond.

A girl, who might well have sat for a picture of Columbine, wearing a pink satin frock all rucked out with yielding pleats and glistening frills, was standing on a gilt footstool by the window. She was reaching a dimpled arm and hand to a canary bird in a silvered cage with pearl minarets at the corners. She looked the daintiest thing that Arnold had ever seen, this Columbine whose hose, whose shoes, were pink ; the shade of pink which rose-growers sacrifice the scent in roses to obtain.

Arnold thrilled at sudden sight of her. He quaked a little ; he felt his knees weaken. This Columbine was Bennetta Sard ! He was in the house of Bennetta Sard. The enormity of the catastrophe shook him with vibrant inbreathing. Presence of mind came tardily to him. She had not seen him ; he yet could escape. He stepped back into the hall and drew the polished door after him. He leaned against the door between the two empty shells of armour.

"This is her house ; this is her home ; she lives here," he thought in a numbed, confused way. "And I love her. I know I love her, and I can't help it. Everything is so useless, so hopeless, so unendurable. She has everything that I cannot give her. She lives in a house like this—— But there is no harm in loving her ; they cannot stop me loving her ; it cannot matter that I love her so long as she never knows." A touch of burlesque tragedy came into his thoughts. "And I have just got to go on loving her, and there's all my life to live yet."

His blood began to thrash at his heart. His flickering fingers fastened and unfastened the buttons of his coat. His wrists weakened and his limbs relaxed. He dropped his hands, dangling them at his sides, and leaned more heavily against the door.

"She did not see me, but she will find out what I am some day, in some manner or other. If I were not a coward I should tell her ; but I can't without letting her see how much I love her."

"She did not see me. I must get out of this house. I will take that other job on ; I can't come back here."

He started from the door, and then turned towards it and pressed upon it with his hands outspread. "Bennetta Sard," he whispered, "Bennetta Sard, I am sorry, but I worship you."

Chapter IV

ARNOLD did not like drawing this model. As soon as he walked round the partition which shielded the door of the advanced life class he wished that he had stayed in the outer room, which was the draped-life class. This model was known as "Poppy." The model now posing in the "Draped" was called "Terra Vert," from a robe of that colour which she at times carried when she sat for the nude. Also he wished he had stayed in the "Draped" as there was an unoccupied easel space next to Bennetta Sard.

Although Arnold and Bennetta usually worked in different rooms, they had opportunities of meeting during the quarter of an hour interval when the models rested. Also, when the school closed for the night he accompanied her to the railway-station and bade her formally good-night by the booking-office. She had never encouraged him to escort her further; he, glad and jealous of his portion, had not jeopardised his good fortune by proffering more attendance than she had intimated would give her pleasure.

Arnold's humble birth and breeding were betrayed to her by many grammatical errors; but he had not that not-to-be-forgiven callow politeness of mind which is given to "one of Nature's gentlemen." Although she knew he was understood in the school to be some kind of mural artist, it did not matter what the occasion, she treated him as a man of good breeding. It was partly her delicacy and tact in wishing him to be spared the chagrin of rebuff by people who had less knowledge of him than she had which made her dispense with his escort before reaching

the railway platform where she would meet acquaintances.

He often wondered why during the years of their friendship she had asked no pertinent question as to the manner of his livelihood, his family, or his social circle; he wondered if this was because, by his not referring to these subjects, he made it other than polite for her to ask. Always her good breeding made him think that he stumbled over the niceties of manners. Sometimes he wondered if she knew his status, and was tolerant of her trusted esquire. Often he hoped that she felt with him that there was an unreality about their friendship which carried with it an impression of sanctity too delicate to last, and which would be hastened to its vanishing by any endeavour to intensify or fix its fugitive fairness.

He asked himself now, as he stood hovering at the door of the life class, if he did well not to attempt to strengthen by closer companionship his association with Bennetta Sard against the time when she should learn that he was not of her caste.

He was undecided whether to return and place an easel beside Bennetta and paint a small study of Terra Vert, or to complete a sketch which he had commenced the previous week of the model he disliked. He saw that the model had been given the same pose; it decided him to fetch the half-finished drawing rather than waste it. He went for his sketch to see if the position which he had occupied before had been taken by a fellow-student; he hoped against hope that it was so, as if his natural desires had to be placated with reason; but he found that the seat which he had occupied was vacant. He remembered now; another young man had sat beside him modelling in red wax a design for a medallion with the figure in the centre; he was there now. The modeller shot a pellet of wax by way of greeting. Arnold screwed up his nose at him.

Arnold selected his crayons and looked at the model, but he did not feel inclined to work. There was the

usual quiet, turned from silence by the brushing sound of the feather-light movements of charcoal, brush, and pencil riding over soft surfaces, and the padding of rubber heels stepping back from easels; but Arnold could not concentrate.

There was something different in himself to-night, some restlessness; but from what cause? He looked round the room. Everything was as usual; the walls had not been painted a new colour; they were cream from the high ceiling to the dado, and that was still brown. The white cloths sagged down, covering the skylights and cutting out the moonlight.

He looked at the students. There was no one looking at him, disturbing him with a sense of being regarded; the room appeared more crowded than it was, owing to the easels breaking into so much space; there was no youth or very young man under twenty in the room, no student fresh to the life class, sending out to the sensitive waves of his embarrassment or self-consciousness; the master was moving unobtrusively from student to student, glancing at their work. The box-like screen where the model disrobed was in its place; the electric light was good; the big platform throne was against the wall, with men no nearer than two feet from it in a sweep making two-thirds of a circle. Of course, there was the model's silly satin and sequin dressing-gown at her feet; but she always threw that there. Why could not she wear a plain sober one, like the others?

He made a couple of lines, savagely, to indicate the pillar on which she was leaning. She had her back to the front of the throne; her forearms rested on a wooden pillar, and her legs splayed a little from where her knees clipped together. She had an artificial Oriental poppy in the basket plaiting of her black hair, and the line of a thin gold chain sank over her shoulders. She wore earrings, big as bangles.

A man with a black moustache broke the hush by asking, "Will it make any difference to anyone if the model takes the flower from her hair?"

"The pendant flashes the light a bit and attracts from the line," said a dour-faced young man who was nearest the wall.

"Do you mind removing them?" asked the master.

Raising an arm from the pedestal, she twirled the flower from her hair to the throne, and let the locket slip to the satin at her feet. Gesture was in her movements; yet, so good a model was she, her pose was not disturbed save for the action of her arm and a ripple of the muscles which commanded it.

"Why does not someone ask her to unhook the curtain rings?" asked Arnold of the man beside him.

"I think Lake asked for them to be put on for a book illustration he's doing. They worry *me*," was the answer.

"Fools," thought Arnold. "Earrings and poppies have only a little to do with it. It is the woman herself who is disturbing; she has too much personality; she does not cease to exist when she holds a pose!"

He continued the subject in his thought while he drew mechanically. Why did one take these unreasoning likes and dislikes? Why did he enjoy drawing Terra Vert, since she also had personality? One knew it by the dulled savagery of her deep-sunk eyes. Yes, but was not hers defensive personality—something to protect herself with—whereas this other was a personality to challenge and attack? If likes and dislikes settled down to a question of the manner in which personalities met, why did he love Bennetta Sard?

The master gave the signal for the interval. The model bent skilfully and picked up the kimono. She tossed her arms through the wide sleeves, and, with two fingers flipping the robe closely about her, became the complete woman again. She stepped to the front of the throne and sat down on the edge. Expanding her shoulders luxuriously, she moved her feet about in semi-circles in the margin between her and the easels, as if she sat upon a raft and trailed her feet through foam.

"Look at the make-up she's got on to-night," said

Arnold's neighbour. "It does not matter to me ; I am using wax ; but I would not do her in oils for her earrings, if they were made of gold. No wonder we have the benefit of her back to-night."

"I can't stand her either," said Arnold. "Why does not she go and stretch herself behind her screen the same as the others ? "

"You don't pack Poppy in a box," said the modeller, polishing his tools. "Anyway, I understand she is going to Dublin to rehearse for pantomime next week. She gave us the information as an item of interest. It was."

"I think she is beautiful, but I don't like her type," said Arnold.

"Oh, yes, she makes up well. Look at that yob Lake asking her if she will have a cigarette."

The men were moving about among their pictures, criticising them. The man with a black moustache came between Arnold's and his neighbour's chair. He swung with a hand on each and inclined his head on one side to glance at the wax medallion.

"Who says we are not an artistic nation," he exclaimed, "when even cocoa tins are to have ornaments on the lids ? "

"Blacking tins," said another.

"That's no good for Day & Martin's ; they'll want something more artistic."

"Don't be sarcastic," said the second speaker. "But who does the figure represent ? "

"Juno," said the modeller.

"No ; that's why I'm asking you."

"What he is trying to ask," said the man with the black moustache, "is, whom does it represent ? Which model did you take it from ? We have not seen her."

"It is the back view, is it not ? " said a man with red hair, who paused as he was passing. "Is it meant to be of a man or a woman ? "

"Pass the hat round, Brooke, while we have a good crowd," said the modeller.

"Which is the figure?" exclaimed a newcomer.

A man leaned his chin on the modeller's shoulder and said, "Turn it round and let me have a look."

"Ye gods!" exclaimed the modeller. "Is this an art or an infant school?"

A gay laugh went up at this indication that the tormented one was nettled. The man with the black moustache stooped and looked critically at the medalion. "An infant school, I should say," he said. Arnold endeavoured to leave the circle, but he was hemmed in.

Lake stood on a chair and looked into the grotto of heads. "The Great Seal of Charles the First warmed up in a gas oven," he said.

"You are wrong," said the modeller. "When I've attached your earring it will be a door-knocker."

"I say, Brooke," said a man on the outside of the little crowd, "Miss Sard was asking for you a minute ago."

"Did you tell her I was coming?" asked Arnold, forcing room to stand up. The men winked and pressed round to that side of the crowd.

"No, I said you were sitting flirting with our model," answered the man.

"Silly ass!" said Arnold.

"What did Miss Sard say?" prompted the man with the black moustache.

"She only asked which was our model to-night," said the man.

"Subtle," said the man with the black moustache, speaking under his breath. Arnold heard him, but knew that he only referred to the jest.

"I put it all right for you, Brooke," said someone. "I said you were only talking to her."

"Where is Miss Sard?" again prompted the man with the black moustache.

"She has gone home," came, rather dolefully, the reply.

Arnold saw that it would be useless to try and force

his way out. He shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

"Oh, don't take it like that, Brooke," said the man with the moustache. "Be a man. Look up, look up and smile. Give him your nice medallion, Barnet. Invest him with the Order of the——"

"Ye gods!" exclaimed the modeller. "Look at his eyes. They are as green as parsley."

Arnold stood up and gripped the man with the moustache by the lapels of his coat. "What were you going to say, Silvercraft?" he demanded huskily.

"Now, don't start outemeraldizing the emerald," said Silvercraft quietly. "I've seen you do it before. I was merely about to suggest that you should be invested with——"

"Time!" called the master. Arnold sank into his chair, and Silvercraft drew in his breath with a brief sigh. The students picked their way to their easels; the model was dropping her robe from her wrists flung back behind her.

Arnold rose and, collecting his material, went into the "draped" class. He was a little surprised to see that Bennetta was not at her easel. He crossed over to the girl who had been sitting near her and asked if Miss Sard was returning. "Well, she wished me good-night," said the girl.

Arnold was rather at a loss what to do. Bennetta had not shown signs of pique before, but he had never previously given her cause. He walked disconsolately down to the street.

Out in the night air, he realised that his unsettled state of mind during the evening had been due to a desire to be beside Bennetta Sard. He peremptorily dismissed all speculation as to the reason for her withdrawal. He decided to wait until he should meet her and then ask if in anything he had been remiss. She was not peevish nor jealous, nor yet a girl given to perform tragedy for the sake of being petted back to comedy and so turning the whole episode to farce, *vide* musical comedies.

He walked a little out of his direct way home that he might see his favourite spot of central Birmingham. Newn Street had one beautiful aspect. One looked towards the pillared portico which stood out from the façade of the rooms of the Society of Music. At early night the scene had rakishness to give a semblance of happy life to its erstwhile drabness and austerity. There had been, and still was, talk of pulling down the portico. "That would be like Birmingham," thought Arnold. "Good luck to her motto, 'Progress,' and to her two sledge-hammers for a crest."

"Was Birmingham, with all her expensiveness, so barren of beauty by reason of the fact that she rose in the hour when architecture was at its lowest ebb? Poetic judgment! The vengeance of Art on Commerce!"

"Art crying, 'Grow great in the hour when I am crushed; to grow great in that hour means that you burgeon because of the things and the means which crush me. Later, when you succour me and raise me up, because you desire a handmaid, I will serve you; but in all your wide streets, your costly buildings, and in the squares where the fountains play, I will cry, "*Behold the City of Limitations.*" And everything you make and which I touch, I will touch it only to write upon it, "*From the City of Limitations.*" Yet because you do not know that you step upon my body when you kiss my robe I will write and cry the words in the language of my chosen.'"

Arnold stood where he would not attract the attention of the women of cheetah steps slinking in and out among the nightfarers. He stood to watch the aimless ones of Birmingham threading and turning round the bases of the foredoomed pillars of the portico. He lost himself in noting the wizened courage common to the eyes of all these promenaders who would fain be debonair.

"How they wear the hammer marks as a badge of their citizenship," he thought. "How in the mass they reveal what they can hide as individuals—the staleness

of their ambitions. The seed of their emotions is dry from being gathered too long ; if it sprouts it can have but a shabby blossoming. Yet in their faces there is everything which is fine—courage and honour and the faith of hope—but shrunk. Mine the same ! ” He shrugged in the Midland manner—as if he itched. “ Born and bred in the City of Limitations. If she bore a genius—yes, at length, one out of her womb, not one born near her who had crept close to be suckled—what a makesport he would be for her ! How ruthlessly she would put her hammer mark on *him* before she lifted him up, broken and bloody, for the world to see. Would he be great enough not to forgive her in his day ? With what a different meaning would the world reply, ‘ From the City of Limitations ’ when she cried, ‘ Behold, out of my womb an artist—clay of my clay ; grime of my grime ; mine ! ’ ”

He felt a gliding touch upon his arm ; it was one of the little sisters of frailty.

“ Get off,” he said, trying to fling away the hand which had tightened. She still clung, babbling of her wares. Fearful of her importunity, he drew a coin of silver from his pocket. As she grasped it he felt his soul sicken and faint ; pausing before him was Bennetta Sard.

She was attended by an elderly gentleman, who stopped, surprised that she had paused before a sight so familiar yet undesirable. Bennetta looked at Arnold but a moment, and then passed, leaving him with his mind reeling. His heart seemed to drop from his breast and then return, fluttering wildly. He remembered, at fatal long last, that she had told him on the previous night that she was leaving the art school at the interval to attend a lecture with her father. What a madman he had been not to remember it before and go straight home.

It must have been obvious to her that he was passing money. There was no mistaking the woman’s profession ; to even a casual examination she was a scented

prostitute, and Bennetta Sard's examination, though swift, was not casual.

"That finishes me off for Bennetta," he muttered, "and the school, and most things that make life worth anything."

PART II

CHAPEL GROVE

Chapter I

THE walls of the Burne-Smith gallery in the Society of Music's room were covered with framed paintings. The Exhibition of the Birmingham Art Society was counted a great success. The walls were completely hidden by finished paintings ; only in the ante-room was a sketch or crayon drawing to be seen. The various Birmingham dailies had done their honest duty by the city in their reports ; they had mentioned Birmingham as leading a renaissance. The artist who designed the posters had been inspired to place through the thumb-hole of the palette one of the hammers from the city arms in lieu of brushes. Moreover, the Birmingham Art Society had won in the struggle with six other local societies to be the first to hold an exhibition after the pillared portico had been pulled down and the whole building renovated.

It was the last afternoon of the exhibition, and many of the season ticket holders now looked at the pictures before looking at the catalogue. It being also Saturday, one or two of the laity were there. Altogether there were sufficient people in the room to give them a pleasant feeling of being interested in the interesting, and yet so few that each could see all the others ; a man needed not to fear that if he lost himself in critical thought before a picture he would be overlooked.

Had that been so, Sard Eglantine Sard would not have been there, for whatever he convinced others of, he never hid from himself the fact that he was interested in all the arts, and was seen at all art ceremonies, because it was necessary for him to be in the " swim "

with every art set in Birmingstow, whether the art was music or painting or acting or writing.

Such prominence was advertisement which brought him pupils, for wherever was ceremony of art in Birmingstow there was to be found glib poseurs unattached to any one of the arts. They were there in the hope of being classed as people of culture ; and they were the ones he sought. He thought it his duty to seek them ; he sought them as a good priest seeks erring souls, sought them as his converts to turn their pose into a reality ; sought them as the ostrich farmer seeks new birds, that their plumage may not be wholly wasted in deserts where they moult.

Professionally he was a violinist and teacher of music. By seeking mongrel intellects which sniffed at the skirt of Birmingstow culture, patting them until their growls became happy barks, and with infinite patience teaching them little tricks—by this he was serving art. He was honest with himself ; honest enough to admit that since these hangers-on were leisured people—children and wives of wealthy manufacturers—his services to art brought satisfactory remuneration ; but at the same time he was honest enough to know that art came first with him, for before the pecuniary advantage of a pupil gained, there was the advantage of a musician gained. He was honest enough not to accept a pupil who had no voice or gift for music. If they flickered into the candle halo, they felt the attraction of the flame, and he wafted them to what he deemed was the whitest shining candle—Music. Although he was served, they were served, and art was served. Otherwise he would not have taught, for he was rich enough to do without, and his playing brought him fuller measure of fame.

In other arts than music he himself was fond of posing ; but when his violin was in his hands he knew not any. When he taught he served art ; when he played he served his soul. And if he did close his eyes upon the platform and thrilled as he lifted his bow, and if he did sink back when he lowered it, nothing was pose.

It was not supplying a demand for eccentricity ; he had not been playing for them. He played in manner similar when he had locked the door of his music-room and lit the tall candle before a fair woman's picture ; played in manner similar, save that sometimes when he ceased he was kneeling. He did not play to that cobblestone pavement of faces before him in the hall ; he played to one who could not hear, trusting she might. Genius he had not, but he had memories which coloured his music with blood and wine and the stain of roses.

He, had very brown eyes which were always in a glow as if about to smile, yet never quite smiled even when his lips were smiling.

His lips were smiling now as he stood between two picked companions. His back was to the biggest picture in the exhibition. Norman de Valing was on his right ; he was little and pink, with the even pinkness of the Christmas tree sugar pig. His eyes also were brown, but they were the brown which is shot with yellow and suggest quartz. His hair, which showed beneath a Homburg hat pulled rather low down to hide baldness, was white. He was dressed in the style for men much younger than himself, and it made him look older than his years.

Mr. Ben Brown, who stood to the left of Mr. Sard, was slight and in no way noticeable ; the colours of his clothing were those natural to a house-fly. He was usually known to be where he was by objectionableness without sting when he spoke. Professionally he was a critic, and of a rare type in that he was without chivalry in his professional capacity. He lived for sugar, and, having access to where literary confections, new from the oven, were displayed, he invariably chose the best to settle on and leave his mark, giving to the people who would have bought the impression that the goods were not wholesome.

The three men were looking at the people moving from picture to picture.

"Tell me who the man with the Raphael face is,"

said de Valing. When he pronounced certain consonants he made a sibilant sound, as if he sipped syrup.

"I haven't seen him before," said Sard.

"He suggests to me a silver lamp," said de Valing, sipping much syrup.

"Why silver?" asked Sard tranquilly.

"Why a lamp?" murmured Mr. Ben Brown.

"Spirituelle," said de Valing.

"Why not tin?" asked Sard.

"Why not a soap-dish?" questioned Brown.

"Oh, why will you jar," appealed de Valing, the syrup giving the last word the sound of "char."

"Spell it," said Brown.

The young man under discussion was attired in a manner which showed that he did not shun attention. He wore a black lounge suit with no peculiarity of cut, but the revers were covered with black silk, which transformed the coat to an unusual dinner-jacket. His cravat was a stock bow tie worn round an upright collar. His hat and dust-coat were in his one hand; he worked the fingers of his other round a catalogue. He was speaking to a big man whose sporting clothes were worn as neatly as if they were a morning-coat suit.

De Valing continued to stare. "But, Sard, I thought you knew everyone," he said. "You are acquainted with the man he is talking to; the one who looks as if he has been successful in love and it had soured him permanently."

"Mm," said Sard. "That is John Rockby. It is his portrait of the lord mayor which they are looking at."

"Shall we step that way?" asked de Valing.

"You step; we'll walk," said Brown. "Although I can save you the trouble if you are after the name of his tailor; it's Clarkson's, telegraphic address, 'Theatricalities.'"

"I have an intuition," lisped de Valing, "one of those psychic rays which reach out and touch with inspiration the poet. It tells me that he also is a poet, perhaps unknown even to himself; but I have touched diamond dust, and my soul is scared."

"Oh, don't sugar so much," said Sard, a trifle irritably. "Remember you have mental diabetes."

De Valing turned from shell pink to salmon with slow and perfect graduation of complexion. They had reached the portrait of the lord mayor, and Sard pressed John Rockby's arm.

"Congratulations," he said. "The other portraits are relegated to a background for yours. No, don't leave your friend ; I only spoke in passing."

The young man was drawing on his light dust-coat. When he had pulled his hat upon his head he was transformed to an average individual. None of the others moved. John Rockby, with a little spurt of annoyance, made the unavoidable introduction. "Mr. Sard, this is Mr. Brooke." And then for some reason he sighed shortly.

"Which of the muses do you serve, Mr. Brooke? I know that you are a priest at one of the altars or you would not be here. Singing? No ; you have a singer's voice, but it is not developed. It's a great pity. You have a voice of the Barticellini quality, see!" He turned to Ben Brown. "You see he shocks the glottis when he laughs."

"I apologise," said Arnold Brooke.

"Ha ! ha ! and he has the temperament. It's always the same ; the men who could sing will not try, and those who ought never to be heard far from a hawker's barrow one has to struggle with till they are heard on the concert platform."

"I do not think I am as musical as a gold-fish," said Arnold.

"Ah, and I hoped it was music. *You have a voice ;* and I should know, eh? I produced Clarence Blowman and Nellie Marks. Do you paint much?"

John Rockby bit his thumb ; Arnold showed confusion.

Sard appealed to John Rockby. "Does he paint much, and is modest?"

The glance of Rockby was cruel rather than cunning, yet his words showed kind as he replied briefly, "Gets his living at it ; but you will not get him to talk about it."

De Valing spoke unexpectedly and trippingly, with the baby-prattle lisp which always drew attention to him when he spoke. "He blushes, but the poet's eye can see. He is like a pomegranate; the rind is thick, and one has to cut deep; but, then, one finds very beautiful blood."

John Rockby looked at Sard Eglantine Sard in slight alarm.

"I am sorry about all this," said Ben Brown, with mock gravity. "I am afraid we shall have to introduce him now. I was hoping you would have kept silent, de Valing. Now there is no occasion to turn toe-pink."

Arnold, not having a sense of humour, usually was enabled to understand the motive which prompted the humour. He was not being amused now; he was asking himself again and again, "Is Mr. Sard Bennetta Sard's father? Is Mr. Sard Bennetta Sard's father?"

Mr. Sard swept his hand through space to indicate de Valing. "Norman de Valing, the poet," he announced. "He does not actually belong to the city; he is staying here, adding to his collection of antiques."

"Birmingstow for antiques?" asked John Rockby.

"Yes," said Brown. "They are locked up in the factories being copied."

Arnold suddenly felt a great radiance beating out from within himself; he saw Bennetta, unattended, walking beside the wall of pictures towards him. He felt that the radiance must show and shine upon his face and startle his companions.

Two years, and he had not seen her in all that time. Oh, the lovable creature! He wondered which of the pictures she favoured with a glance as she came towards the group. Again she was a new presentation of herself; she wore chiffon about her shoulders; about her dress were chiffon flowers; it seemed that she would float away.

De Valing was quoting something about "the pipe for ever dropping honey," and Ben Brown was interrupting him. Sard Eglantine Sard, facing Arnold, had his back to Bennetta.

She reached and touched his shoulder as she came near. "Daddy," she said.

He looked round, smiling. "Where is your aunt, sweetheart?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, her head is so bad, daddy, poor thing. She said she could not come, and she looked so dreadfully pale I wanted to stay, but she said you would be cross—not cross, no, she did not say that; she said worried. She said you would worry if you waited and we did not come. I wonder why she always gets a headache when she is going to the theatre? Do you think she likes theatres, or do you think she likes them so much that the excitement is too much for her? I brought her ticket; it is such a pity for a seat to be wasted on the first night of a Romney Rain play. Will you keep them?" She handed an envelope to her father. "Thanks, daddy. Now I am ready to have my hand shaken off. Bad Benny Brown, how do you do? Mr. de Valing—but I see you so much these days, why trouble? It is Mr. Rockby, isn't it? Oh, I have forgotten who this is. Father has such an enormous collection, you must not blame me."

"No, this is a new one. Mr. Brooke, my daughter."

The mill-race of Arnold's emotions made him grateful for the opportunity to bow his head. It was her little tinted hand which he saw held out for him to touch, to take and hold a moment; a moment while its warmth, the warmth of magnolia blossom on a southern wall, should melt his heart.

"This ticket any use to you, Mr. Rockby?" asked Mr. Sard.

"It would have been, but I have booked already for Miss Green and myself."

"Mr. Brooke, do you care for the theatre? Romney Rain is putting on his new play in poetic prose, *Grapes of Tinder*. It's an event. If you would care to make one of our party we should be pleased for you to join us," said Mr. Sard.

"I should be delighted," said Arnold, looking neither to right nor left.

"We shall see you later then, Mr. Rockby," said Mr. Sard. "Come on, all you people."

"Before we do go," said Ben Brown, "let me have some credit for introducing Mr. Rockby to de Valing. Get him to let you paint his picture. My commission is ten per cent. I suggest a life-size full length. He can afford it, since he can afford to have as many books published as he writes."

"Of all the arts I think painting is the one blasé. I hate blasé people. I am *sorry*," said de Valing, pointing the remark with an apology, and turning to Arnold to finish his remarks.

Arnold abstractedly passed his thumbs under the dust-coat and raised the silk lapels until they overlaid the outer coat. None knew that he was tense with controlled nervousness. With his fingers he drew the wings of his bow tie until he made it a flower cupped towards de Valing. "We all have our pet aversions," he said nonchalantly. "I hate vulgarity ; I am *sorry*." He directed his glance and his speech at de Valing.

John Rockby gave a start of amazement and leaned towards Arnold, so closely did he examine him. The party began to move down the staircase to the street, de Valing ruling conversation with his slippery speech.

"You remind me very much of a man I once knew," he was saying, "your accent as well as your appearance. He used to say that he hated vulgarity, and he was the kind of person who would take his rings off and put them beside his soup plate. He thinks he is very caustic, and on one occasion he tried to be caustic with me. My great friend, Lord Tilting, whom I lived with for so many years, had a financial loss, and I tried to reinstate him by establishing a business in a very smart part of London. It is not necessary to tell you what the business was, but of course I had nothing to do with it. The de Valings have never been in trade. The family motto is 'Death if not Honour.'"

They were traversing a by-street congested with a Saturday evening crowd, and de Valing shrank occasionally, as if from contamination. The party was moving

in a group close around Bennetta. De Valing continued, "When this person saw me at an 'at home' of Lady Barowner's—he is Lord Barowner's secretary, by the way; I do not know how he obtained the position; I think I once heard him say that his aunt was distantly related to Eddie Barowner—Lord Barowner, that is—this person said to me, and there were so many of my friends present, 'Tell me, do you live over the shop?' I did not show any feeling; that pride and fortitude which is given to the de Valings upheld me. I merely treated him as a servant and said, 'Breezely, that is your forebears coming out in you.'"

This story being directed to Arnold, it was left to him to make comment. "And—er——" Arnold began. "Were you living over the shop?"

De Valing groaned. "Oh, you can have no idea of the circles I move in!"

"You must not take de Valing too flippantly," said Ben Brown. "He is a superb example of 'It is blood that tells and silence is golden.'"

They were nearing the theatre.

"What an unpleasant man that must have been," remarked Bennetta, with a smile somewhere in her kindness.

"Of course," said de Valing succulently, "one ignores that class of person. They do not understand a subtle intellect. Wit is wasted on them. He is a fearful liar, and I remember on one occasion looking under a table where we sat talking, and he asked what I was looking for. I said, 'I am looking for the Spirit of Truth,' and this outrageous liar, this fearful liar, said, 'I am he.' Just an example, Mr. Brooke." De Valing tossed his hand in the air as if it had held the idea or a carrier pigeon which he released for its journey.

"Quite wasted," agreed Arnold. "And did you ever find the Spirit of Truth, Mr. de Valing?"

Arnold felt a little tug from the finger and thumb on the lobe of his ear. He was crossing the entrance hall of the theatre. He turned and found that Sard Eglantine Sard was the offender, but that he was smiling.

"Now let him win for a round or two," said Mr. Sard privily.

"Very good, sir," said Arnold.

Sard tweaked his ear again at the moment when de Valing looked round.

"Wondering if you could make a silk purse out of it?" he asked rudely.

Arnold felt his skin thicken as it were to flannel. It was well that Sard had made the request. His whole body seemed dulled to cotton-wool with mortification.

"When the rapier fails, the flat iron," said Ben Brown. "The point is yours, Mr. Brooke."

The interior of the Dawn Theatre pleased Arnold. It was not flaunting nor ornate, as were the older Birmingham theatres. There were no gilded nor enamelled carvings. The intended suggestion of the interior of a Greek temple was gained by simple pillars in half-round dividing the walls into panels, which were painted a deep and a deeper blue to suggest a surflless sea and cloudless sky as seen from between the pillars. The pillars had simple Ionic caps. The ceiling was plain. The proscenium was no more lavish than the walls. There were fewer pillars at that end, and a plain curtain of purple hung between them, as if beyond was the altar and the statue of the goddess.

The audience was not so pleasing to Arnold. They seemed constrained by feeling a weight of poetic-prose tragedy yet to come. They had the voices and mannerisms of disciplinarians. They did not appear to be happy. They were negative in the impression they created. Where was the abandonment? The theatre felt like a place of rituals, the place of ceremonies for a Birmingham circle of one of the fine arts. Arnold assumed that this theatre, with its company of players and its selection of plays, could easily become an acquired taste entailing a friendly, almost homely, interest in its hardworking ladies and gentlemen of the stage and its meek audience, who came regularly play by play.

But where was the far horizon? In every face which was turned toward the gangway as he entered Arnold

saw a preparedness to be pleased by the arrival of a customary patron whose features had become familiar. He saw that they were all members of a little friendly-art-and-diffident society, eager to be led but needing painfully to be told whither. They were those who, lacking the sensitive body of art-endeavour, wore, in effort to achieve its semblance, the beautiful robe of art-appreciation cut to the pattern which the fashion of the moment dictated. They were vain of being a minority ; they were proud and sure of their intelligence ; they were those who chastely appreciated original crudities.

Arnold stood still near the door. He wondered what would have happened had he come here among them straight from a day's work. He wondered if these thought the things which he thought, or how they thought, and why he did not think or act or love like a man of his station.

He sighed. "Although I may never paint a picture which will satisfy me," he thought, "art has given me this—myself that is all myself—but is that the gift of art or isolation? Perhaps my mother was right ; I think too much. I am too much alone. I will acquire friends now that I have the opportunity. I will cease to look at the far horizon ; the horizon cannot be reached, it shifts away.

"Mr. Brooke, why don't you come down to your seat ? They have sent me back for you. That fool de Valing has annoyed you ? " Ben Brown had returned and was speaking.

"Not in the least ; I think he is just a fussy old maid. I was looking at the theatre, as I have not been in here before," said Arnold. "But why was he so rude to me ? At first he was the other extreme—gush."

"The reason was obvious ; Miss Sard smiled very charmingly upon you when you were introduced."

"Indeed," said Arnold. "But what has that to do with it ? "

"De Valing is paying attentions to Miss Sard. You must put it down to love," said Brown whimsically.

"But he is an old man. It's an impossibility. Oh, I see you are jesting again; you supposed I admire Miss Sard. Of course I do."

"No, I was serious."

"What does—her father say in the matter?" asked Arnold. He had been about to say, "What does she say in the matter?"

"Well, it looks to me as if Mr. Sard favours his suit; otherwise he would not play you off against him to bring him to the point."

"How do you know that he intends to do that?" asked Arnold, rather coldly.

"He has given you the seat next to Miss Sard, and you had better get to it before the curtain goes up. I must get to my seat; I'm dramatic critic for the *Birmingstow Watcher*. Oh, you didn't know. I should prefer to sit in the gallery, really; there are sure to be mountains in the first scene, and I am told that as a rule from the gallery one may see men in bowler hats walking behind the mountains."

"Do you put things like that in your critiques?" asked Arnold innocently.

"Not over my initials," said Brown, horrified. "Romney Rain is a friend of mine. To know Romney Rain is to be in with the people that matter; to know me is to get not unimpartial criticisms. If Sard is going to adopt you, you do well to recognise at the commencement that we are honest in dishonesty. What I say hurts no one; what I write matters. Everything works like a home-made sewing machine—'Clique! Clique! Clique!'"

Arnold pretended to understand. The theatre was half empty. He wondered what had been meant by "a new play by Romney Rain being an event." He turned to Ben Brown again. It had already struck him that one had to turn to the critic for information as he never appeared to be facing any one. "This theatre, does it pay?"

"What does it matter? It is run by a large-spirited gentleman as a charity to Birmingstow's intelligence."

"But will he fling pearls for ever since they are so disregarded?"

"Why should he not? There are a few ropes of pearls left unflung and a great number of continually and highly critical persons living in Birmingstow."

"I don't know why he should or should not; I do not know the gentleman. I only wondered if his generosity was based on his inner grace or a misunderstanding of his townsmen."

A thin trumpet-blast shivered with silver cadences from beyond the purple curtain; it was the sign that the play was about to commence.

"Shu—shu!" The waiting audience—waiting for an opportunity to say this—sprang upon the pretext. The light dropped through twilight to an early morning darkness as the two men walked down to their seats, Ben Brown emitting a louder "Shu—shu!" than anyone. As they reached their seats the curtain trembled to rise. All of the obedient throng leaned yearningly forward with their eyes aiming at the very centre of the stage; they held their breaths till the light turned completely to blackness, then they loosed their breaths; they had done their duty. They began to fumble and sort out their gloves and furs and chocolates. Above the sound of their mousy restlessness the curtain was heard to swish away, but nothing was seen, only a heavier press of darkness hurt the eyes of those who stared.

An awed voice near Arnold whispered, "Isn't it weird?"

"Shu—shu!" said Brown. "They are going to begin; I can hear the prompter." But no sound came from the stage. The cheated audience perforce began to hold their breaths again.

"It is going to be a tragedy?" the awed voice made whisper.

"It is a tragedy," replied a tense voice, also a female's. "This scene is called 'The Valley of Stars.'"

Arnold stared until he thought he imagined specks

of gold light about the place where he suspected the stage should be. He closed his eyes to relieve them of strain. He was reminded of going into his mother's coal-cellar when it was too dark to see which corner the slack was in. After a minute he opened his eyes; nothing was changed. He wondered if the electric light had failed. He felt the dramatic critic at his side shake as if with private laughter. Someone sneezed, but Arnold concluded it was a member of the audience.

The oppressive darkness began to lose force in comparison to the oppressive stillness and silence. He thought it must be even worse for the girls who had in their mouths chocolates which they feared to masticate lest they made a sound.

The little specks of light were coming before his eyes again; he understood; it was not hallucination; they were mites of tinfoil catching inconsiderable light thrown up the concave background of the stage, making stars in the Valley of Stars. His ears became accustomed to the silence. The stage began to grow light as the stage dawn broke, falteringly.

The stage grew bright. The scene depicted was in some way peculiar; the mountains in the valley were pointed and fairly sharp, as if they had not been climbed on or used much. No two of them were the same triangle. They were in two rows or ranges, one behind the other. Of the back row, no two were the same colour; one was tangerine, another emerald, another heliotrope; the mountains in the front were black and white alternately, with the exception of the third from the right—that was of black and white squares.

"Won-der-ful," whispered the awed voice behind Arnold.

In the middle of the stage was a wedge-shaped slab of rock painted in natural colours, and upon it lay an actress. She was sleeping. She wore a diadem which fitted closely round her brows. It was made from a bright and neat tin funnel fretted with holes.

She opened her eyes and raised an arm, and began to declaim :

“Murky, unmindful dawn now comes,
Challenging the ready voiced cock
With quiet music. Stemmed with light
She lifts her lance of lily shine.
Unmindful dawn, how long ere yet
The brooding forethought of another day——”

“After all,” thought Arnold, “I am sitting beside Bennetta Sard.”

Chapter II

ARNOLD laughed, perhaps a little too loudly for the occasion and the company, and certainly more generously than sufficed the jest; but then, he laughed rather because he was happy than because Ben Brown was amusing. He had been spending a week-end at the home of Bennetta Sard. True, Norman de Valing had been a fellow-guest, but, if anything, that only gave him cause for abandon, and taught him that to the desperate all odds are even chances.

He was desperate, not in endeavour to win the love of Bennetta, but to retain his close association with her to the end that she might be turned from an admiration which she had for Norman de Valing. He doubted if any woman, and above all one so young as Bennetta and bred as she had been, could understand the decadence of de Valing. He had tried to tell her—tell her that de Valing was not to be rated at his own valuation. He had said, “De Valing is a newt living in a drain, who thinks he is not slate colour but a gorgeous lizard because the two are members of one family. True, he has a golden underside, but he drags it in the mud.” And Bennetta, if she had understood or not, had said, “Do not you begin to cover up jealousy with wit; I am tired of clever people. Ben Brown says that ‘Wit is a twin, and was born a day old, so that spleen should not be the elder brother.’”

Those week-ends which Arnold spent as a guest of Sard Eglantine Sard were times of ecstasy—emotional and mental ecstasy—although they entailed companionship with Norman de Valing.

And so Arnold, whose lack of a sense of humour was replaced by a sense of the ridiculous, was feeling his youth for the first time. It was a pleasant occupation

to speculate upon one's neighbours in the battue of talent driven towards the cloakroom of the Corinthian Room of the Regal Hotel (the grandest room of the grandest hotel of Birmingstow, where the Quest Association was holding a special evening. The voice of the beaters and drivers were heard up the elaborate staircase, crying, "Please put all your things on one hook. Please put all your things on one hook." Ben Brown had just said to Arnold, "—and there is another good specimen; the George Robey dame, something Eyebrow! I shouldn't be surprised if she was a painter of the Oxo-Cubist School; thins the paint with beef tea." So Arnold laughed.

De Valing, who was near, murmured to Miss Sard, "I should like to see that young man walk into a room where there were several gentlemen and laugh as he does now. It would be worth a great deal to see the expression on their faces."

Bennetta said, "Your voice carries, Mr. de Valing." De Valing bowed slightly.

"Yes," he admitted, "it comes from reading my poems aloud; I read rather well. One has to read one's poems at the moment of writing to judge the euphony, lest the inspiration of the moment betrays the artist to the craftsman. I have an original idea to——"

Arnold turned his head over his shoulder and said, "According to statistics, if all your original ideas were placed end to end they would reach nearly round your hat brim, and you don't take a very large size."

"Brown," said de Valing, "don't let him get out of hand in public."

On these special nights the Quest Association imported into the city a poet or writer of recognised genius that he might lecture to the literary set, which for the occasion made overtures to others of the cultural societies of the city, and invited their principal lights to shine at the gathering. The poet for this evening was Blaise Fennel, whose famous *Songs of Every Day* bring up pictures of simple lives lived and loved in a fragrant house of rosewood.

The evening began at seven o'clock with refreshments in the Diamond Room, where for an hour those who had axes to grind ground them. It was a blessed hour for Arnold. He was left with Bennetta at a little table with a hammered copper surface, to which coffee and sandwiches and confections were brought. Ben Brown and Mr. Sard and Norman de Valing were seen gliding and lingering, and laughing and gliding on again, among the many whom they knew, and ever and again they returned, separately or in trio, to the quiet table in the alcove where Arnold and Bennetta sat.

The little table was directly facing the aisle between the tables, where members and guests were constantly rising and bowing and exchanging cards or Press cuttings. Bennetta and Arnold watched the crowd in silence.

To Arnold it appeared that Birmingstow culture developed a trombone blatancy of voice, a chancicleer strut, and a flow of speech which amounted to verbosity. Not that all the guests were thus inflated, but there were so many who swelled and swelled in their orbits of murky brightness that they eclipsed the more steadily shining moons, not with a brighter radiance, but because they thrust their bulks into the foreground.

"I am becoming depressed," said Bennetta suddenly. "Find something amusing to say."

"Have I been very remiss?" asked Arnold humbly. "Shall I simulate inspiration—start up from the table and rush up and down Mincing Lane so that they will think that I am Blaise Fennel?" He indicated as Mincing Lane the aisle along which de Valing was picking his delicate way. "Which is Blaise Fennel?"

"I don't know. Suppose we start a game called 'Pick the Poet.'"

"Pleasure," said Arnold. "How do you play it?"

"Pick the Poet," said Bennetta dogmatically, "or 'Impatience,' as it is called, is a simple enough game. It can be played by one person——"

"Oh!" said Arnold, "but it is better with two, isn't it? Do try and remember if the book of rules said that, Miss Sard."

"It may also be played by two or more," said Bennetta.

"Oh, no," said Arnold decidedly, "not more than two; you were thinking of bezique."

"Of course it is better with no more than two," she replied. "All that is required for the game is a large room in which are kept rolling some two hundred representatives of a great city's interest in the arts; among these is introduced a poet of the first water—I don't think I have that quite correct."

"Yes, water will do for a poet."

"We will be on the safe side and say genius. Picking the Poet consists of guessing which one is the genius. It sounds simple; try it here in Birmingstow, where there are so many who might be the one. You may have first go, but don't pick the æsthete whom father is speaking to. Father looks as if he were quoting, 'No one but God and I knows what is in my heart.' The æsthete is the organist at the cathedral and happens to be the son of our butcher also. Father is grumbling about to-morrow's joint."

"Wait a minute," said Arnold. "I must not play haphazard. You see that big shirt-front of a man who is talking in C sharp? That cannot be Blaise Fennel or half the men present are Blaise Fennels. 'Fennel for fragrance, in leaf and seed,' said de Valing. That maidenly fancy does not help much."

"Look for the man who is being deferred to most," said Bennetta.

"No one is being deferred to or deferring to anyone, unless it is that little man who has knuckled under to the shirt-front. You will be sandbagged immediately if you go along that trail."

"Then I shall look for someone strikingly handsome and intelligent."

"Need I stand more in the light? I am so comfortable sitting here. Do you think he is one of that quartette of big fame hunters winding their intellectual horns? Do you know what he looks like?"

"No. I asked Ben Brown, and he didn't know."

"You say 'Ben Brown,' and he isn't much older than I am," exclaimed Arnold. "Why, then, do you always call me Mr. Brooke?"

"I respect you more."

A waiter came to refill cups with coffee. When he had gone, Arnold drew down a great leaf of the palm behind him so that his face was in shadow.

"Miss Sard," he said impulsively, "I wish I had the gift of being able to express myself like that de Valing man—no, not like him—just to say what I mean and what I feel. You once saw me giving money to an unnamable woman in Newn Street; now you say you respect me!"

His hand lay beside hers upon the cloth. She outstretched a little finger so that it touched a vein upon his hand. "You have put that unfortunately," she said, "and you have shaded your face: but it does not matter. When I saw you then your face was in the light, and it made explanation unnecessary. The explanation is probably simple, but I do not wish to know it. When I have known anyone several years, as I had known you then, and I am told that that person has done something which does not fit in with all I know about him, I say, not that I have misread him, but that there is some explanation; that I have not all the pieces of the puzzle."

"There are not many women like you, Miss Sard," he said simply.

"Thank you," she said gravely.

"You deserve to be mated with a good man." He loosed the great palm-leaf, and it shot up, fanning a moment while he spoke and crossing him with palmate shadows. "Norman de Valing is not that man. I do not speak in envy nor jealousy. I speak because in this I am worthy of your respect. He is only a travesty of a lover. I am not a lover; so in that I am no travesty; yet I am a travesty, a charlatan, a humbug in many things. I am only——"

"Norman de Valing is a poet of merit. I do not like you to speak like this of him."

"I cannot judge if he be a poet or merely a maker of

verse. My wares are pictures, and I cannot judge his. But there is nothing in his life so sacred that he could not quip about it. You are good, and he is only a travesty of goodness. Do not think that I am attempting to lower him in your esteem because I wish to stand higher. I am pleading for you."

"If you are struggling to say that he is not a gentleman," said Bennetta, "he has all the seemliness of one, and he comes of a good family."

"There again I cannot judge. I admit he has the manners of a gentlewoman? My blood is plebeian; I cannot judge his. But this I know: you are too good for him, and yet you are not too good for many men. I blunder. It is my curse that I have not words, but only feelings, *feelings*, *feelings*!"

"That is not a curse. He is a poor artist who has to write beneath his picture, 'This is a church.'"

Arnold leaned towards her. "You mean," he asked, "that when he says, 'This is love,' 'This is poetry,' 'This is breeding,' 'This is——'?"

"Do not talk about it any more," she interrupted. "When we sat down I said that I was depressed. I think it is being among all these people that makes me feel that father is right to be disappointed in me for not having achieved something. I know that he feels it that I have no special gift for music or anything. He once said to me, 'What is the use of training you? I could make you technically perfect, but you would be a poor advertisement for me.'"

"But," remonstrated Arnold, "you gave promise of being an artist when we used to sit on those silly little seats at the art school."

"Yes," responded Bennetta with languor, "I paint dicky-birds and pretty sea-shells now. I can sing and play an instrument or two like that. I act in amateur theatricals and write sonnets to 'A Quiet Garden' like that. That is not what father wants; that is not what would satisfy the desire which all this gives me."

"There is always something which a woman like you

can do for art," said Arnold, his voice deepening its tone. "You can be the inspiration."

"Yes, I have thought of that," said Bennetta gravely, and then laughed with slight mirth. "Do not begin to call me woman yet or I shall have to do my ideas on top and wear my sentiments long."

"What did you mean when you said all this depresses you? All which?" asked Arnold.

"A festival of talent like this," she said, flinging him a glance. "Everyone here has done something, or is doing something, for art. They paint, they write, they sing, they act, they play—were you attempting sarcasm?"

"No. I judge that the majority of these people tossed up, and tossed up to decide if they should splash about in the arts or church work, the arts or politics, and the arts were unfortunate. I judge that the minority manage to squeeze a living from it. Seeing them separately, I hold that each carries his banner so that passers-by may bend their glance upon the standard-bearer rather than the standard. Seeing them muster, to me there is no question but that by waving their banners so violently to attract attention they tear the mottos written on them. Yes, I know; you are going to say that any man can be a cynic; that it is easy to pull down but difficult to build; but see. In this room are most of the Knights of Birmingham culture, and also in this room is—Blaise Fennel, the sweetest English singer; and listen to the Petticoat Market hubbub. To ask where is the reverence is to ask what is the merit of the artists."

"This sounds like spleenishness," said Bennetta. "Have you offered a picture to the Birmingham Art Gallery and they have refused it?"

"No, I haven't!" he said. "But I love this city. I was born in her grime and her filth and her ugliness. One has to be born of her to love her; for unless one loves her because of her work-stricken features, which were those he knew best when his nature was tender, he cannot be expected to admire her face when he sees it painted like that of an acting woman in a penny gaff."

And because I love her, I so long for her to have one of her children born a genius who could paint her picture. One who loved her although he knew she would break him with iron before the paint was dry."

"You are said to be an artist," said Bennetta, looking down the room. "You are her son. I do not know anything about your work beyond those little pictures which you gave father. Has it any importance in your life?"

"It is the only thing which points my direction to happiness. Always it points to happiness; whether that happiness lies in the work itself, or in hope of fame, or in worthiness to love."

"You are a mystery in some things. You belong to none of the societies. You may sell your work by private contract, but we never see it. Why do you not, as father wishes, hold an exhibition? Talk it over with him again. I know there are questions of expense, but—talk it over with father again. You know the interest we can arouse among these I-design-my-own-door-knocker people." She stretched her hand as if in mock blessing towards the crowd. She gave a little gasp of surprise. "Look! Look at the man who is coming down Mincing Lane."

Arnold looked. A man, who might have passed unnoticed in the street but stood out startlingly in this company, had worked his way through the press at the far end of the aisle. There was nothing eccentric about him, but he looked pitifully out of place. He had on a long, worn, white macintosh, with its collar fastened close under his chin; below it showed the turn-ups of a pair of flannel trousers. He wore plimsoles on his feet, and neither wore nor carried a hat. He was not older than twenty-five years. He was tall, and broad of shoulder, but his macintosh flapped upon him as he walked. His hair was red with an orange redness, and diamonded with raindrops. His skin was white, save where upon his cheek-bones were blushes of carmine, as if either excitement had varied his natural paleness, or as if consumption knew him well.

His manner of progress was strange. He made *détour* for none. But once or twice, when he passed between two people conversing, he turned his head and looked at one or other of them. He paused as each few steps brought him between two tables, and looked down at the food in the silver baskets, and once he swayed his head a little, as if he criticised the aroma of steaming coffee which was near.

Arnold wondered what would happen when he reached the palm, since it was the extreme end of Mincing Lane ; if he would turn and retrace his steps. As the man came near, the raindrops in his hair ceased to wink with white flashes. He came close to the end table and looked down at the silver baskets. He ground his hands in the linings of his pockets. He drew a hand from his pocket and passed it among his hair. "It is only water," he said, speaking to himself. "Rain."

Arnold looked round the room. Sard and his two principal friends were engaged in a laughing conversation with friends near the door ; one or two guests were looking at the new-comer, but they turned their glances after a moment or two. The two carmine spots on the man's cheeks were suddenly extinguished. He lowered his eyelids ; when he lifted them again he was looking at Bennetta Sard.

"Pardon, madam, but may I sit at your table ? " he asked. "There will be some time to wait yet."

"Certainly," she said slowly, retaining with her own glance the glance which the man had seemed to place upon her.

"Thank you, madam," he said, but he did not move. "Pardon, madam, but are you a native of Birmingham ? "

"Yes," she said.

Two great tears gathered on his lashes. He seemed unconscious of them. They overflowed, and were followed by others, and the two bright spots appeared upon his cheek again.

"Won't you sit down ? " asked Arnold.

"When madam will cease to ask me to look at her,"

he said. Bennetta started. "Thank you, madam," he said, and took the seat behind the palm.

"I think that I should like more coffee," said Benetta. "Will you attract the waiter's attention?"

Arnold snapped his fingers. A waiter started to come towards him, but was deterred for a moment by a woman in lemon satin romaine. "Shall you order at the same time, sir," asked Arnold.

"I have not come to steal a meal," said the man. "I have come to see Blaise Fennel."

"Surely there can be no question of stealing; we are guests," said Bennetta gently.

"I am not a guest. I was refused admission. I waited until both stewards went to open the door of the mayor's car before the chauffeur. Then I managed to get in."

"Can we do anything for you?" asked Bennetta.

"Yes, madam. Do not let the aroma of hot coffee come near me."

The waiter reached the table.

"Would you clear the table, please?" she said. The waiter lifted the silver trays and bore them away.

"You admire Blaise Fennel?" asked Bennetta then.

"More than I do any of our poets," answered the man. "He is the most human. His fault is that, being conscious of his dexterity, he shows it; otherwise he would have genius. The man who can throw knives in a pattern round his subject is truly great, yet not so great as he who can, but does not."

"You yourself write?" asked Bennetta. "Have I seen anything of yours anywhere?"

As if by magical control of his blood the two carmine blushes lapsed for a moment from the man's cheek. He shook his head.

Mr. Sard and de Valing came to the table. "It is time we found a seat," said Mr. Sard.

Arnold and Bennetta rose.

"Good-night, sir," said Arnold to the red-haired man.

"I have never called a man 'sir' in my life," proclaimed de Valing.

Arnold and Bennetta looked swiftly at the unbidden guest. He had not blanched at the remark. He still sat gazing before him as if through a narrow gateway at a horizonless vista.

A number of guests were already seated in the Corinthian Room when Arnold entered. An elderly gentleman, bald and with a great beard, and another elderly gentleman, clean-shaven and with quantities of hair, sat upon the platform, and between them sat the slightly built man to whom the 'shirt-front' had been talking. The little man was evidently Blaise Fennel—the thrush among the chanticleers.

As Arnold stood in the doorway the man with the red hair walked past into the room. De Valing gave a little exclamation of refined horror.

"What is the matter?" asked Bennetta.

"Oh!" exclaimed de Valing, rubbing his cuff with his handkerchief. "He touched me as he passed."

The man walked before the platform and directed a glance at Blaise Fennel, who was arranging notes. He did not check his steps, but arrived at a pillar, where he leaned.

Sard and those with him chose seats not far from the pillar. De Valing was seated next to Bennetta; Ben Brown was at the end of a row of chairs. Arnold sat behind him, near to the red-haired man. There was a chair left vacant for the man, but he remained standing. Blaise Fennel rose and began to speak, and from that moment the man's glance did not turn from him, but at times it developed distance and then restored its range to the speaker's face, as if the man were asking questions of himself anent Blaise Fennel and answering them; or as if he asked the same question many times, and each time found a different answer.

The audience listened silently to the compelling beauty of the essayist's words. Pearl phrases were sown about the essay, but they were all as solitaires to fasten the shimmering garment of his argument rather than ornaments to make it unnecessarily fine. When the poem of his prose was about to become too fraught

with imagery and phantasy he rescued it with an almost trite remark ; as when he said, " Can the successful man teach us ideals ? He can but show us that his crown is cut from a single gem and muffed with ermine so that it rests softly. Can the failure teach us ideals ? To him despair is rain along the three hundred and sixty odd hills of the year ; he can show us only that sunshine is good."

Arnold watched the red-haired man throughout Blaise Fennel's speech. He doubted that the man heeded a word that was spoken. He surmised that he kept his face towards the speaker and asked and answered, and asked and answered continually the one question. " What was the question ? " wondered Arnold.

Blaise Fennel ceased speaking. There followed speeches and seconding speeches. Members of the audience asked permission to speak, basing their claim to speak on various performances which they had given in the world of letters. They spoke, and the reporters were kept busy. The glance of the red-haired man remained now upon the face of Blaise Fennel, for the question seemed answered.

The audience rustled and rose. The larger moons of Birmingstow culture arranged themselves before the platform, to be acknowledged by the lesser lights as they fizzled out. Mr. Fennel was kept hemmed back in one corner of the platform by them. Either he was modest, and used them as a bodyguard, or he had been pushed where he was so that he might not outshine. He seemed content.

The hall was half empty when the red-haired man moved from the pillar. He walked in direct line towards the poet. His face was alarming in its intentness. The colour had fled his cheeks. His hand was thrust in the breast of his macintosh, as if he clutched a weapon. He approached the row of guards and attempted to pass between two of them—one was the " shirt-front " man.

The two guards closed in and blocked the opening

that had been between them. The red-haired man did not look at them. He made a side-step before the shirt-front and endeavoured to pass, but was checked again.

As if ordinary emotions came to him tardily, the red-haired man turned his glance upon the guard. A piteous expression sagged his features. He began to speak in a voice which was tremulous and weak in plaint. "I want to speak to Mr. Fennel. I want to ask him something. I want to give him something—something he will cherish."

The guard sniffed. "The gentleman cannot be troubled by such as you," he said.

"Then will you let me see you give it him?" pleaded the man desperately. He unfastened the macintosh and half drew forth a roll of manuscript. A look of disgust came upon the other's face as the macintosh fell open, and revealed that the big-boned, emaciated body it had hidden was naked to the waist.

The guard put his gloved left hand upon the shoulder of the macintosh. "This means prison," he said.

"I have no clothes and I *must* see Mr. Fennel.

"You can't!" said the guard.

The man slipped from between the guard's fingers; he had fainted. The noise of his fall was as of lead falling on wood, although the pavement was marble.

"Carry him out into the air of the street," said the guard. "Do not let the police interfere; we do not want fuss."

Blaise Fennel pushed past his guards and stepped down from the platform. "Was someone asking for me?" he enquired.

"No, Mr. Fennel," said the shirt-fronted guard. "It is only a man has fainted with the heat."

"Poor fellow," said Blaise Fennel. "I am sorry. Where is he?"

"They have taken him into the street."

Chapter III

ARNOLD checked his stride in the marble vestibule of the Royalties Hotel where Norman de Valing was staying, and to which he had requested him to come. Arnold wondered why he had been asked to call—if it was for anything which was particularly unpleasant ; he also wondered if he would manage to be civil in the event of de Valing being very sugary.

He suspected that Mr. Sard, or Bennetta acting through Mr. Sard, had petitioned de Valing to press the advisability of an exhibition of Arnold Brooke's pictures. With tact, Sard Eglantine Sard had intimated that he himself would consider that he was doing art and the city of Birmingstow a service by covering expenses, and by seeing that the most useful people were entangled in the scheme.

From their first meeting Arnold had liked Mr. Sard, and his liking had taken a great leap to something which was near filial affection on the night when the musician had played for him alone. The candle in the music-room had not been lit, and Sard Eglantine Sard had played from the dusk into the dark. For hours he had played on in the darkness, the violin at his shoulder seeming to have become a limb of his body for its readiness to obey his will, a voice of his heart to obey his moods. When he ceased there had been a long quietness. Then he had said, "Is there someone in the room with me?"

"Yes, Arnold Brooke," the young man had replied.

"The artist?" Mr. Sard asked, as if he struggled with the vagaries of old recollections.

"No ; just Arnold Brooke," Arnold had answered.

And now he wondered what he should say if Mr. Sard

was repeating his offer of publicity. Ben Brown was also willing to help with comments in the Press. Arnold wondered what de Valing could do in the matter save pose and look pink.

Arnold asked himself what answer he should make to de Valing if such were the reason for this interview. He wondered how he could tell de Valing that if he did decide to break the shell of his reticence in art he would sooner use any other art-whisk to froth up his praise. It was so difficult to be rude to kindness, even when that kindness came from the most odious of all vulgar types—a vulgar patrician.

Arnold walked slowly to where the marble vestibule opened out to the marble lounge. De Valing was sitting in a red morocco arm-chair. With polished stone on his every side his flesh looked pulpy in its freshness. Arnold noticed with slight distaste that he had used the excuse of shaving to carry powder across his nose, and that the powder was pink—a different pink from his complexion. It was possibly the powder which was scented with white rose perfume; but a thinner perfume was about him somewhere, on his side hair or his handkerchief or his person; the two essences mixed without mingling. Apart from the objectionableness of either scent, the ill-assortment of the two offended Arnold as much as if they had been clashing colours—pea green and middle chrome. He knew that he would not be able to be civil throughout the night.

De Valing did not rise. He put out his hand to be lifted, and said, "You are late; I hate unpunctuality."

"In what way late? I made no appointment," said Arnold.

"I am so disappointed in you. You vacillate. But then"—here came a weary sigh—"I have had so many disappointments; I grow accustomed to them. Shall I tell you of my dream?"

Arnold examined him more carefully than ever he had cared to before. He came to no conclusion. He supposed that a mastiff looking at a Pekinese would arrive at the same extent of deduction: the Pekinese

was another dog, an entire dog, but a dog of another sort, and the stuff he smelt of had been put on to take away his dog odour.

"You can relate your dreams if it will give you any pleasure, but cannot we go somewhere else? This marble place reminds me of the crematorium, particularly near the fireplace; it looks like the portals where the bodies slide in. Those damned things on the pillars are probably sample urns. It is rather a fine night outside."

"It is chilly; we will go to my rooms. There is a fire there, and I have some things which I wish you to see." He rose and walked towards the lift, touching tables and chairs on either side of him with his fingertips as he passed them. "I did not know that you were an authority on decoration. You would like my place in Devonshire. I have lately had electric light installed, and I catch it and float it down in hanging bowls of coloured glass. It gives—you know that golden brown light which hangs above Napoleon's tomb? I have always considered it worthy of a greater man. At night all my rooms are lit with it. By day all my rooms are grey." Again the weary sigh. "I have lived so long with grey, but no one wants a frozen bridegroom."

Arnold looked at the man in stupefaction. "What in the name of April fool is he working to?" he asked himself as the lift swept upward. "Is he working up to anything or is he having as much difficulty in being civil as I am and overdoing it in consequence?"

"I was about to tell you my dream," said de Valing, taking his keys from his pocket as he walked along the passage. "When I first saw you I thought, 'There is a man who needs a friend.' I pictured you coming down to my place in Devonshire, and my helping you with your art, and it being linked with my poetry——" He fitted the key in the door and revealed the room.

It was turned from an ordinary hotel room by a massing of chrysanthemums, which frilled and curled back their petals to the stem, and whose odour reminded

Arnold of cemeteries. There was extant another perfume, a distilled perfume loose in the air ; it was a thick perfume like hyacinth, terribly out of place. Arnold followed into the room and pushed the door to with his heel.

"For what did you ask me to visit you?" he asked.

"I was telling you of my dream."

"I know. What did you want to see me about?"

De Valing picked up an oval marquetry box, and, sliding the lid, took one of the many little aromatic pastilles which were contained therein. He spurned the air with his fingers as he flung it to the blazing fire. A pungent odour of friar's balsam wafted in a gust from the flame.

"What was that for?" asked Arnold, wishing the moment he had spoken that he had not shown interest.

De Valing rucked the purses beneath his eyes as intimation of abhorrence, and said, "I hate the smell of paint. I am *sorry*."

Arnold gave an audible gasp. For a week he had been enamelling with geranium the post-office pillar-boxes about the streets of Birmingstow, and he believed that De Valing must have seen him, and knowing him for a "spare-time" gentleman, had arranged a private torture before he betrayed him to Bennetta Sard ; before he made the announcement which would damn him in the eyes of the cultural clique. "A lamp-post painter," he would say.

Arnold had the hallucination which comes to those who have run in circles of devastating fear round some dreaded obsession, drawing closer as they speed, and at the moment when they rush into the sucking hole of the vortex are unprepared, and succumb to demented terror, lapseless panic. He had the illusion that he could actually feel his brain, like a cloven humming-top, reeling, yet rocking as it spun from the string ; that as it went in one direction, his body was whisked round and round in the opposite, at incredible speed, upon a spinning table. Such sensation is too intense to last

beyond moments, but into each moment is coerced time not dictated to by clocks.

Arnold's panic lasted only the length of his gasp. It did not exhaust itself. He clamped it down under the crow-bar of his will, which he had tempered to toughest steel by agonising over his special cowardice in the years which had made it possible for him to walk laughing among the acquaintances of Bennetta Sard without any knowing that he trembled with sickening fear at every step.

It came suddenly to Arnold that de Valing, in speaking of paint, had only been referring to his admitted painting of pictures, and that what was intended was a slight upon what Arnold considered the most cherished guerdon from his youth.

After all, his secret was not known.

His gasp of startled surprise would be put down to feeling the artist in him scratched, and not the spare-time gentleman stabbed.

De Valing made lissome his thumb and finger with spectacular daintiness, and chose another pastille. He tipped it into the fire as if he cherished it and mourned to let it go. So must Cleopatra have placed the pearl in wine, knowing well that not only her court and Anthony, but all the unborn men of coming ages, watched.

"Shall I tell you my dream?" he asked.

"No; tell me why I was asked to call."

"You enter where angels fear to tread."

"Perhaps they cannot stand the stink," said Arnold.

"Oh, well, the dream?"

De Valing placed the oval box upon the mantelshelf. "When first I saw you," he said, "I thought, 'There is the most reliable man I have ever seen. He looks as if he would follow an ideal through any torrent which barred his path,' but I saw also that you were of the earth earthy; one of the common people, vulgar and ill-bred. So much was apparent in your face. Be seated; you are not then so overpowering." De Valing reached and cast another pastille to the blaze, and

continued: "It is my pleasure to help the struggling artists who show themselves worthy of my assistance. I had visions of you coming to Valingtree and my helping you in whatever way money could to pursue your art in a beautiful environment."

"And your dream?" persisted Arnold wearily, passing the oval box to de Valing before the owner could reach it.

"That was my dream," said de Valing mournfully. "I thought it was time that our rivers met—rivers of thought and song. The awakening was cruel; but, then, I might have known that where scum floats there cannot be artistic depth."

Arnold began to wonder if the man had been drinking or if a life of artificial glossing had softened his brain. He pitied him, but he could not understand him or for what he pitied him. "I suppose," he thought, "it is the mastiff pitying the Pekinese and the Pekinese pitying the mastiff." He looked round the room a little bewildered.

"Ah, no," sighed de Valing, "it is too late for that now," and shook his head. "But there are ways in which I can help you." He swept his hands through space, as if he smoothed away all trouble and woe from the future of Arnold. "Do you wish to be helped?"

"Yes," said Arnold, who thought this the quickest way to find out the motive of the invitation. "Yes. Only keep your little hands still; they make me feel that you sit up till two and three in the morning doing fancy-work."

"The conversation is becoming impossible. Are you willing for me to help you?"

Arnold knew perfectly well that the other expected him to say "No!" Before he spoke he reached the pastilles once more, and, passing them, said "Yes."

De Valing shook his head and said wearily, "Ah! I knew you were calculating."

Arnold had never admired himself so much as now, when he remained silent. "So this," he thought, "is a little sip of the cup which is drunk by those who sell

their self-respect to gain recognition." He wondered what the dregs were like, and loathed Norman de Valing.

"My object in asking you to see me was to offer you the illustrating of a book—a book of poems which is to carry the spirit of Birmingstow on bird o' paradise wings out of the smoke of its habitation and set it free in the world. You are essentially a Birmingstow man. I am *sorry*. The illustrations need to be done by someone who would treat the subject-matter sympathetically, and must therefore be of the city; the lower the better, so long as he can illustrate."

"Tell me more about it," said Arnold. "Is it your own verse?"

"There is a distinction between verse and poetry," said de Valing. "But of course you could not be expected to know. Several of the poems are my own. My connection with the city has been neglected too long; it is time that my oil showed rainbow-spread upon the surface of its river."

"There is quite a lot of oil from the factories floating on the River Day as it is. I rather think that is why they brick it in in its channel like an open sewer."

"Oh, why will you jar?" asked de Valing, using one of his favourite expressions. He drew in his breath through his teeth with a liquid sound of distaste.

"Who are the other poems by?" asked Arnold.

By way of reply de Valing drew from his pocket a wallet, and, taking therefrom a newspaper cutting, handed it to Arnold. Arnold took and read it:

"DEATH OF BIRMINGSTOW'S CARROTY POET"

"A verdict of 'death from starvation' was recorded at an inquest held by the Birmingstow Coroner to-day respecting the death of a man who was found dead in the room where he lodged at No. 7 Dayside Street. The body was found by Charles Grummel, his landlord, on Wednesday last, but death had taken place four days previously.

"The man's name is unknown, but he had occupied the room for several months. He was a well-known

figure in the neighbourhood owing to his peculiar appearance and habits. His hair was red and worn long, and this, together with his habit of stopping in the street and writing on scraps of paper, occasioned his being called 'The Carroty Poet'——"

A little glitter of anger flashed in Arnold as he realised who the man was from the slighting epithet. He looked up swiftly at de Valing, who was stroking his eyebrows with his forefinger, and asked, "Did you see what they called him?"

"Yes. Quaint, isn't it?"

"And in this, his obituary notice—the only marble he will ever have, Here, take it! I won't finish reading it."

"But there is to be a memorial. I intend to publish his poems," announced de Valing.

Arnold started from his chair and took a step forward. "I have misjudged you, sir," he exclaimed. "I apologise for anything slighting which I have said. Is this the book I may illustrate? Is there much of his writing found? How did you get hold of it, and where did——"

"Please sit down," said de Valing. "If you finish reading the cutting you will see what was left."

Arnold made a gesture of anger which finished in scorn. "Not that tripe. Tell me yourself."

"He was found, not in bed, but on a box where he had been leaning looking through the window. The house is on the height of one of those mountains of slums which look down the roofs to the heart of the city. Evidently his last act was to yearn over his Jerusalem—I am writing all this in the preface. In the firegrate were three charred blocks of what had evidently been the MSS. of two novels and a collection of poems. They were placed as if he had gone round them and over them with a lighted candle until they were burned through, with infinite patience and pain."

"Can you feel like that about it?" asked Arnold.

"I can do more; I can write like it. I am quoting from the preface to the book. The whole MSS. were

destroyed except the upper portion of the title page of one, and on the other the dedication was uppermost, and, although dropped over with candle grease, the wording could be read since the typing had charred to a dull black and the page to lead colour. The title of the one was 'The City of Iron Kisses.' Rather ridiculous, I think, since kisses, not being concrete, cannot be mineral. The dedication of the other was, 'To all those who make this, my city, beautiful with their passing to and fro.' The poems were only distinguishable as such by the orderliness of their lines in ashes."

"Might the two have been duplicates of one?"

"No; different proportions."

"What did you save, and how?"

"There were torn-up scraps of paper lying about the room. The police, thinking these might lead to the identity of the deceased, gummed the fragments on sheets of paper. There are twelve sheets forming seven complete poems. I will show them to you."

De Valing rose with such grace and languor as if he were facing a music-hall audience rather than a young man in irruption from conflicting admiration for his contemplated service to the art of the city and contempt for his immasculine movements. There was upon a table a silver casket, which had panels depicting scenes from de Valing's poems in enamel. The lid was raised, and a little pile of brown paper sheets gummed over with scraps of paper was produced. Arnold took them reverently.

The sheets were typewritten, and across the top of the first one was written in a careless handwriting, which in some way looked gay and jaunty beside the straight-laced typing, "This poem is below the dignity of the others. DELETE." Arnold turned over the upper corners of the others, and found that on each was written "DELETE."

"But," said Arnold, "He did not wish these to be published."

"What has that to do with it?" asked de Valing.

"What has——" Arnold began, and broke off with

a click of his tongue. "Throw a few more of those fumigators on the fire. Throw them all on!"

"What for?" asked de Valing, and Arnold knew that he could have bitten his tongue out for asking.

"Because I hate the smell of blue blood when it begins to stink. I'm sorry," said Arnold.

"I have not arranged with you to do the illustrations," said de Valing.

"I was not speaking of them," snapped Arnold.

"You see, I think so quickly," said de Valing, with his finicking lisp. "I have thought all you have thought and am miles ahead before you get there."

"If you have thought all that I have thought since I spoke, it is a miracle that you have me in the room. But, then, it is a miracle that either of us can tolerate the other at all."

"I allow for certain things."

"Then allow for them for a few minutes longer while I read," said Arnold, and leaned his elbows on the table, one either side of the brown sheets, while he read.

BLOOMARY NOCTURN

In the Iron-mill the wheels sing,
Sing a phantasy of frenzy;
In the Iron-mill the wheels sing,
Sounding like a sweet, mad lady
Laughing by a rushing torrent.
Whirling wheel and leaping pulley
With a shriek begin at evening,
With a moan succumb at morning;
For the mill grants bail at morning
To the prisoners it has hoarded.

Vainly the mill grants bail at morning
When the prisoners are jaded,
Spent and bruised and worn and broken,
Caring but to sleep till evening;
Spent and bruised and very weary,
That they may not see the sunshine
Lighting up the comely meadows,
See the fleet kingfisher flashing
Up and down the shallow river,
Where the village boys are bathing
And the water lilies slumber.

In the morn the Sun is shining
 Through the iron framework windows,
 Painting on the wall before them
 Great church doors in saffron yellow,
 Barred across with bolts of purple
 From the shadows of the framework.
 And the bolts drop lower, lower,
 As the brave Sun rises higher,
 The bars sinister effacing—
 And the prisoners are free.

Oh, how slowly the Moon is setting !
 Tardily the Sun is coming
 Into his own, into his own,
 How the Moon is slow in setting !
 Grudgingly the Sun is coming ;
 Somewhere in the World out yonder
 Nightingales are in the copses,
 There are moths among the heather,
 There are pine-trees standing talking
 To the wind along the hillside.

Nightingales are in the copses,
 There are moths among the heather,
 There are pine-trees standing talking
 To the wind along the hillside.
 Oh, how slow the Sun is coming.
God—You made me as a poet
And you crush me to a blacksmith !

As Arnold laid aside the sheet de Valing said, “ The man was uneducated, and the lines will want touching up—the ideas as well as the diction. I am altering the last line to something like this : ‘ But the town has many pleasures which the country does not dream of.’ That was probably what he was looking for or trying to express when he scribbled, ‘ This poem is below the dignity of the others.’ ”

“ You daren’t ! ” exclaimed Arnold. “ You daren’t come with a morphodite touch and emasculate a male poem like that. Oh, I know why you bear insults from me. It is because you think you can beat me at the game ; because the courage that is given to the de Valings will not let them back out of a war such as

ours ; but I am not sneering now. I am not setting up black country metal against whatever God in His mystery has made you of. I am not thinking of you. I don't care one of these little disinfecting tablets what you think of me—no more than you care what such as I think of you. I don't see you, don't know you. I only see a red-haired man moving his head from side to side above the vapour of a cup of coffee. I only see him lying with white ribs naked among patent leather shoes, and his fingers clawed and locked over a roll of songs an hour before they were murdered, companioned in a heap and murdered together ; burned at a stake for singing worship of a false god. And now you—you bring these discarded songs, that were not thought worthy of the stake, and wish to set them up and make them princes because their brothers were martyrs. And as if that were not enough, before they are shown to the populace you—— Oh, you daren't do it. You dare not. There's a dead man leaning out of heaven with a hand to stop you." Arnold sank his voice so that the last words were not perfectly clear.

" Surely you do not pose as an authority on literature or honour as well as posing as a painter of pictures ? " scoffed de Valing.

" No, I do not. I do not know if from an artistic point of view those lines are good or bad or very bad, but I know what my day to-day has been, and what my to-morrow will be, and at the end, and the end (to come when I am no older than he was) all the reward a heap of charred pictures in a corner, and I thanking God that hunger can kill ; dying at a window on one of the slum mountains of Birmingstow, yearning over my Jerusalem. I do *not* know if those poems are flawless or full of flaws of English. But this I know ; the spirit is true. A man does not sacrifice his life for an ideal and yet not know better than a man who only approaches it for the sake of a five-line review in a London paper. Why do you wish to alter it ? "

De Valing assumed a pose. Laying the tips of his extended fingers upon his shoulders, he turned his

wrists at right angles and so formed epaulettes. "If you peep beneath the poet's mantle," he said, "you should behold the philosopher. That verse ending exhibits, not a philosopher beneath the mantle, but a dissatisfied navvy. Why complain that God crushes to a blacksmith? Why not exultation? A poet is a *great soul*, equal, whether he be a tramp, like such a one as wrote those lines, or whether he is doomed, as I, to loiter about a king's garden."

Arnold laid the sheets together in their little pile, and, placing his arms upon the table, interlaced his fingers so that the poems were locked in like an ancient encampment in its earthworks. He looked at de Valing, and suffered his gaze for a minute before he spoke—coldly, and without the insolence of his defiant class. He said, "You have no right to interfere with these poems. The author wished them to be destroyed, even before he destroyed the others, as not representative of his pen. Why did he burn his completed work? Answer that and you will see that you cannot publish what was left—these crackled shards of pottery belong to the Museum of Oblivion."

"It is obvious that his spirit weakened at the end. He thought his work was a failure, that it was not good enough to reveal some aspects of the 'City of Iron Kisses,'" said de Valing, caressing a much mended and waxed china vase which he had discovered in an antique dealer's that morning.

Arnold retained his arms in a surround about the poems, but he lay back in the chair and laughed and laughed, throatily and mirthlessly. "Oh, you pretty-picture, buttercup-pasture, cow-mooing poet-philosopher!" he said. Then he laughed again, heavily, as if death were the jest which piqued his mirth.

"And what is there funny in that?" asked de Valing, with selected accent.

"Funny?" exclaimed Arnold, swaying his head but not his shoulders. "Nothing. Men weep sometimes for joy; why should not they laugh for sadness?" He rose and spread his hands, almost touching the

poems. "He burned his book because he knew the value of it—realised that it was perfection great with promise. Of all his inspirations, at the last came his greatest. It should have been his first. He spent the strength of his soul for the city; at the moment when that strength failed he had his giant revelation. His city was not worthy of his art. He realised it and destroyed what he had made." He turned scornfully to de Valing. "And what do you think your society of quacks would have done with the researches of this physician?"

"Do not soil the MS.," said de Valing. "The police gave them to me in very neat condition."

"Gave them to you?" said Arnold. "You are one of the very type which he preserved his books from by destroying them. Nothing touches you—one of the little worms of culture that the sick dog of civilisation vomits. Nothing touches you; you thrive on disinfectants." De Valing retained his nonchalant manner, which was driving Arnold to frenzy. "Nothing touches you. Think, that man touched you in the press when he was dying of starvation, and you wiped your sleeve with a handkerchief; now, to get a local kissing, you propose to scrape his discarded mental rags together to show up some of your rhymes that you were showing Miss Sard:

"Great City, sheltering commerce
From the shocks of those
Who would with strikes and mummers
Place her in the throes
Of misery, want, or ruin——"

Arnold suddenly stopped and then stared at the ceiling. He sat down in the chair collapsingly. "God!" he said. "I had not thought of that. I know, I have always known, that if this city ever bred a genius that she would break him on her rack of 'Bread and butchers' meat is necessary; art is not'; that she would hang him up broken and bloody by the Market Hall. Well, she has had her chance, and she has delivered herself of her

genius.” He drew out the words slowly, as if he read them written clumsily upon the belt of a spring-back measuring tape which he was gradually drawing forth. “Even his name she has erased. That I suspected she would do. But I did not realise that she would not be content in destroying the artist. She also destroys his art.”

“I assume you are very long-windedly saying, ‘Can any good come out of Nazareth?’” said de Valing.

“No, I am not. The Best came out of Nazareth. For what? To be crucified. But His life-work was spared. This town has not the milk of Nazareth.”

“Perhaps you had better go,” said de Valing wearily. As if to intimate that there was to be no formal adieu, he walked to the window and looked at the sky.

Arnold picked up the brown papers and counted them. There were twelve sheets yielding seven poems. He lifted them tenderly and laid them on the fire. They coiled in the blaze and fell back dead, mingling their black ashes.

De Valing turned and walked towards the oval box of inlaid marquetry, his hand extended for a pastille. He stopped as he saw the black flakes in the fire.

“So!” said Arnold. “Something touches you. If that does not cauterise your nostrils I do not know what would.” He walked to the door with an old face.

Chapter IV

“ Oh, that’s neither me leg nor me elbow. If you’re going to do it, do it ; if you ain’t, say so.” The verbal peacock screech of Mrs. Raddle made fell havoc of the quiet which had existed in the back gardens of Chapel Grove. In his sequestered rubbish-patch behind the bean-sticks Mr. Raddle had been discovered sitting at ease. He was also smoking.

Screwed up as he was between the shock of bean-sticks, the dustbin, and the palings, his knees at his chin, he was out of view from the windows of his house. His attitude might have been thought far from comfortable ; an attitude less furtive than that of a couchant leveret in tip brushwood yet more furtive than that of a wood-louse in its selected woodrot.

“ What do you think you are—*a modest violet* ? ” She planted the back of her wrists among her hips and regarded him in constrained power.

“ I’m only having a straightback, Emma,” he made soft answer.

“ Ow, it’s Emma an’ Ernie now, is it ? An’ what about the taters you was told to get up, eh, Ernie ? It’ll be me as’ll have to touch if there’s none for your supper. You’ll be damning and blasting, threatening me again—now don’t you start again ; I’m ready for you this time. I’m not always agoing to take it lying down ; even a worm will turn. With all the street up in arms, and everybody crying shame on yer. Yes—yes ! Every week-end the same, starting yer bullying.” All her words were now on one note, since she had reached the highest in her register. “ I begin to hate Saturdays and Sundays. Dread ’em. Dread ’em ! ”

“ Ar. Arter you’ve ’ad all out on me of a Friday

night; you don't start creating till you've 'andled the last odd clogs o' me wages."

During this half-hearted counter-attack Mrs. Raddle filled out her pose till it was that of a Spanish dancing-woman arresting attention before she commenced a bolero. She even smiled, and, jaunty, lifted her chin. But she did not commence to dance; she tapped her more forward foot and worked her head as if she reeved in rope.

"Go on," she said. "Go on. Tell me I have it all off you, like some women would if you'd married 'em."

"Well, don't you? I 'ad none back this week."

"Then what brings yer smoking? I suppose it's tea leaves again."

"No, it's broken glass."

"Here! Here! Here!" she flung separately pennies round his feet. "Bite 'em. See if they are good 'uns."

"Give us another penny. I get half an ounce for fourpence."

She threw down a fourth coin.

"Can you spare it?" he asked.

"No. I can't. What about them taters?"

"I took 'em into the scullery half an hour ago. They are under the sink."

She may have been mollified. "Well, get us some mint." She half turned, but only half. Mr. Raddle rose, revealing at the side of the box on which he had been sitting a bottle half filled with beer.

"You lousy, drunken, good-for-nothing swine, you are nothing better than a soddened sewer-rat. You——"

Arnold closed the window of his bedroom, where he was packing a bag. A little "Raddle" amused him, but much of it made him irritable. Being unreasonable, it was his mother who bore the brunt of his ill-humour. He had not, as then, realised how wonderful a mother is, and of all mothers she the most wonderful for his particular needs.

She was blacking his shoes, with an energy made profligate of its little store in reserve, and there was

trepidation in her mother heart. She could not decide whether or not to broach a certain subject to Arno, and so long as she was kept busy helping him to leave the house as a gentleman her indecision decided its own issue. She would have no opportunity to ask Arno if he was not mistaken—ever so, ever so mistaken—in turning round in the manner of his life like he had done during the last year; to waste so much money on pleasure and dress and in keeping in with people who often spent more in an evening than he earned in a week. And to what end—to impress people without heart, except for their own kind, and to lose all his niceness like he was doing—he had not lost his niceness yet, but he would—and he had no need to be an ape before he was a gentleman; he was signed a gentleman by his inner nature.

“Mother! Where’s my new socks—the plain ones?”

She went to the pile of garments she had stacked and pulled out the grey socks, and went to the foot of the stairs.

“I’ll throw them up,” she said.

“No, bring them. I’m behind-hand as it is.”

He heard her slow hurry on the stairs, the shaking of the handrail as she gripped it. He was always annoyed by her having to put both feet on each step; almost as much as by her having to walk down the stairs backwards because she did not want to fall.

“It would have been quicker for me to fetch them,” he said, as she brought them into the room.

Her face, as it had lost its freshest outline, had modulated into very tender curves and soft contours, that made for beauty—the unambitious beauty of a cottage garden pink, which even in its wilting is beautiful; chiefly because it is an unpretentious flower. Neither her gentle mouth nor even her plenteous hair, which was the grey of morning light, and rested lambently about her forehead, served to keep attention from her eyes; great, silent eyes, vivid with the grey and glisten of an evening after rain. But Arnold,

because he was her son who had always known her, did not know how beautiful she was.

She laid the socks on the bed, and Arnold pushed a couple of double collars towards her, saying, "You might warm the insides of these over the gas to stop my tie slipping. Here's the matches. No, like this. Have you seen another stud about anywhere? I've had one kicking about for days, and now I want it blessed if I can drop on it. You have not been clearing up, have you?"

"No, Arno, but I'll go across to the shop and get you one if you like."

"It don't matter. Oh, I'd better have one. I don't know. I really want a button on this shirt before I pack it up. Have you got an octagonal one left?"

"Do you mean one of those with corners on?"

"Yes."

"I'll look in the button-bag, and do you want me to get you a stud or not?"

"No, no, no. I've said a dozen times. I'll make shift. Can you bring the button up here to put on? Oh, I'll come down. I want a tuck in the sleeve of the shirt I have on. Oh, I'll come down. Let me go first."

As she followed him downstairs she asked, "Shall you be home Sunday night or go straight to work Monday?"

"I don't know for sure. To-morrow night, I expect."

"Where are you going?"

"Stopping at Mr. Sard's over to-morrow. Why?"

"Nothing, Arno, only I don't know where to find you if anything happened." She tipped up the calico button-bag, and the miscellaneous collection of little things ran over the table.

"Happened? Good heavens!" he said. "What do you want to do it that way for? Wouldn't it be better to pick one out?"

"I thought you was in a hurry, and wanted one with corners on. Don't be hasty with me, Arno."

"All right, mother, all right."

His mother's hand shook on the needle a little as she

pleated the tuck. She wondered if the time was right to ask him if he was sure he was right to be sowing unsparingly through his spring the golden grain he might want as food before the harvest.

"Some way to-night I wish I'd got the little shop again, Arno."

"Good heavens! Why, mother? You don't want a poky little place like that again, with everyone coming in and out to see you, even if it is a job to get along sometimes. Why do you want it again?"

"It was company when you'd gone to night school, and—and it would help a bit if you have another bad winter. You've been lucky two years running now, but you know what the painting trade is; it's only good for six months of the year."

"Well, I shall have work while Norths have got any, anyway. I only had six short weeks last winter; no reason why this should not be the same."

"It might not, Arno."

"Well, I hope it is. I've spent the last of my savings. I had not a penny yesterday till I was paid. Have you finished my shoes?"

"No, I'll do them. Here's the shirt." He ran lightly up the stairs, and his mother went sadly to polish his shoes.

She had not been able to tell him all she wanted to, yet she felt she had not failed altogether. He had not been hasty about it. She heard him coming down the stairs for his shoes, and she put them on the bottom step for him and went back into the scullery even more quickly than usual. He had never seen her cry.

She had made a cup of tea to warm him as he went, but he could not stay to drink it, and for the first time in his life he forgot to wish her good-night.

As he closed the front door and touched his silken scarf, to assure himself again that no part of his gala attire was revealed for the scrutiny and comment of those who pry through grimy curtains and gritty panes, he heard the voice of Mrs. Raddle, which made little of a modifying row of houses between, it being a voice

which was trained to the acoustics of a rectangular block of houses.

"She is everything which stands for this side of my life," he thought. "Raddle, stewed peas, the Petticoat Market, fish and chips. She is music halls and home; she is all that never went with evening dress."

He chanced to glance at the bay window of Mrs. Raddle's parlour. The cotton lace curtains were dyed to ochre, about eighty shades deeper than "Paris," as which colour they had been bought. "Cream" curtains were fashionable in Chapel Grove as they "did not show the dirt," and so escaped some of "the rack and ruin of washing-day." Apparently Mrs. Raddle's curtains had not escaped last washing-day; if a banal colour can shriek, these squealed. Under their tent of gold thread stood a maroon jardinière in which was the inevitable Chapel Grove aspidistra, with leaves coiled laxly from endeavour to grow toward the light, despite how many times it was turned round. On the ledge of the window-sash was the long red polony of a draught excluder. The curtains were tied stringently back with crocheted blue curtain bands, through which was threaded and bowed a purple ribbon. In the shadowy room beyond this colour conglomeration, and so delicate by contrast that it appeared to be as deliciously tinted as mother of pearl, was the face of Mary, who was called the Rose of Chapel Grove.

She was Mrs. Raddle's stepdaughter. She had Cinderella's face—Cinderella of the fireside rather than the ballroom. Her little head was massed about with amber-coloured curls and her eyes were of darker blue than woodland hyacinths.

She was not looking at Arnold; she was gazing drearily into distance beyond distance. Arnold checked his thoughts. "I did not mean you, Rose of Chapel Grove," he said to himself. "I bet it galls you much as it does me. I wonder if that was funny—Mrs. Raddle asking Ernie if he thought he was a violet? This 'back chat' and the painter's 'rousting' and the

men at the School of Art 'pulling somebody's leg,' if it were put into king's English, is the 'brilliant wit' of Sard and de Valing and Ben Brown and all the others. I wish I could laugh at it when their wit passes by me. It makes me think I am a clavier with one or two dummy keys. It must be a shock to some of them when they put all their skill and delicacy of touch into a chord and I do not respond, but remain with my little dummy keys stopping up.

"I wonder if that is why de Valing's taunts never ruffle me, if it's because from the beginning I sensed the malice of the whole and am not able to record the witty worth of separate sallies.

"At present he thinks that every stab tells and I bear it stoically. He knows I cannot be slain with his Vere-de-Vere birth. What will he do when he finds I cannot be mortified with wit? It cannot be long before he finds out that I have no sense of humour, although I have complete comprehension of things ridiculous. How will he strike at me then? For he will not let me alone. It is too late for him to ignore me. I must be prepared."

He worried over the problem, not because it was urgent, but because he had other anxieties. Money was wanted; a week-end with an evening at a theatre left him with empty pockets throughout the week. He had told Mr. Sard that he was devoting himself to art and could not spare so much time for pleasure, but when he did show himself, he had to cast silver as a drunken man scrambles pennies. Work worried him; it was after the end of the busy season, and firms lived from job to job. His health was not his wonderful heart-dancing health; he had had peculiar stiletto slashes inside him, and, although he mentioned them to no one, each time they ran him through his mind slipped its leash and coursed back to the memory of a boy lying prone, screaming for the removal of his beloved father. As ever when the great anxieties surround, the petty irritations received the labouring of the mind. The vultures may be sitting intent around

the man collapsing in the wilderness ; it is the sand blowing into his ears which he knocks away. So Arnold worried as to what Norman de Valing would do next.

He released the buttons of his coat as he entered the Palatine Hotel, where he was to meet Sard Eglantine Sard, and put on a bravura air as he surrendered his suit-case to a page to carry to the cloakroom.

Arnold had a warming of his heart towards Mr. Sard whenever he encountered him, since the quality of Mr. Sard's welcoming smile intimated that he savoured the cream of content in becoming aware of his young friend's presence.

Norman de Valing was seated with Mr. Sard, but he rose and meandered between the little tables to one in a corner where two ladies were seated. Arnold watched him out of the corner of his mind.

"Mr. de Valing grows kind," said Arnold as he shook hands with Mr. Sard.

"Oh, I believe he is coming back in a moment," said Sard. "What are you drinking?"

Before he could reply, a refined cheering, quietly extolling, rose from those who sat round the little table. Attention was drawn to a handsome elderly gentleman, who had entered in company with several others and a lady. He was the Earl of Callantyre, who had been awarding prizes at a flying meeting earlier in the afternoon.

"Rather distinguished company to-night," said Mr. Sard. "And that is Sir Charles Wanmore, the actor-manager, behind you. He's a disappointment off, isn't he? By the way, why *did* you destroy those papers of de Valing's?"

"Mr. Sard, how could they be his? I know the police gave them him, but they had no right to. I destroyed them because that was obviously the wish of the author. He burned his best work. He had written on these that they were not for publication. He had torn them to small pieces and thrown them away. If they belonged to anyone they belonged to

another Birmingstow failure who would appreciate them. De Valing is a successful foreigner, and he designed to utilise them that their sweet acid should show how soothing was the anointing oil he intended to smear the city with. You must pardon me if I am heated about it, but de Valing is a cuckoo bird. He contemplated exploiting the work of a man who had suffered the extreme penalty for being born an artist of this city. He had died of starvation ; that was enough, without having a literary resurrection man exhume and sell his intellectual corpse to the city which had——”

Mr. Sard chuckled and held up his hand.

“ Oh, well,” said Arnold sulkily, “ I know I have not the gift of tongues like he has, but I know what I mean.”

“ What do you mean ? ” asked Sard. “ Go quietly, and have another shot.”

“ I mean,” said Arnold, “ this city makes window transparencies and advertises them in her catalogue as cathedral glass——”

“ Does music enter into that sweeping assertion ? ”

“ I do not understand music. The meanest music that is not vulgar turns my heart to water. The same as do the works of the great composers. But I know that there is such a thing as really bad verse and atrocious painting, and, worse than that, there is mediocre art of all kinds which goes decked in royal regalia. Music I cannot say. There seems to be ever a crowd of musicians who to me are wonderful, coming and going here as if Birmingstow were a well which supplied them with some necessity. Half the singers of the land may be bred of Birmingstow. I do not know. I only wish to speak of what I understand. There is that big bearded musician we have ; one feels in the second minute of seeing him that he is great, but in the first minute one has felt that he is not of Birmingstow, drop by drop. He may be, I don't know ; he may have been born in a house facing the ludicrous fountain memorial, or he may have come from not far away with others to the well.”

"No, he was born in London," said Mr. Sard.

"You were not born in Birmingstow of Birmingstow stock. You came with others to the well. You ask me what I think of a thing of which I have no knowledge ; weigh that in with my opinion. The city prides herself on being a centre of culture in the other arts, whereas she is only a centre for commercialising them. She is great as an educational centre. I have not travelled, and yet I know that. She should be content with that and not set up a culture shop. A little culture is vulgarity ; it makes the pupil spurn the ethics of nature. As far as music is concerned here, I should say it is as with the churches—not indifference which prevents exaltation, but general and weak interest." Arnold stopped abruptly.

"You think, then," said Sard, "that Birmingstow cannot make an artist? "

"*God makes the artist and then leaves him to the mercy of fools,*" said Arnold.

"Barret Ager, the novelist, represents Birmingstow. Do you say he is not an artist? "

"One of the finest. But he is not of Birmingstow. In the novel *The Doctor of Chance*, which is practically autobiography, he speaks of himself as coming from the country near. Ten miles away is far enough to find a different civilisation. He was born and bred to later youth at Broachampton, in a green spot of the black country."

"Are you an artist? "

"Why do you ask? "

"De Valing said you destroyed the poems to escape revealing that you could not illustrate them," said Mr Sard.

"Then it *was* a trap!" exclaimed Arnold, starting up. "I wondered why he asked me to visit him." Arnold sat down again ; de Valing was come to the table.

"Are you a professional artist or not? " asked Mr. Sard.

"I have been speaking to a lady where he worked

last week," said Norman de Valing. "He is two things ; he is a journeyman housepainter, when he can get work, and he is also a spare-time gentleman."

It seemed as if every person in the lounge must have heard the words. The whole world seemed hushed to Arnold, so that he heard the rubbing of a woman's furs behind him.

"Cad !" said Arnold. "Cad, and a cad to no purpose. Whatever is the outcome of this, it will not benefit you a scrap. Right—*right*—*right* in the middle of you, you are a cad. My blood tells me that ; my blood, which is of the servant classes. I was born in one of the worst streets in Birmingstow ; I am engaged in one of the meanest occupations ; and I despise you too much to pity you. If I met you in the pages of a book I should say you were drawn from a valet who had been left money ; but, meeting you in real life, you make every drop of blood in my body separately sick."

Mr. Sard and de Valing retained the dignity of silence. Arno rose as a man with cramp, and picked up his gloves with his fingers. "This is the difficult part," he thought, "the untheatrical exit. There is an earl beside you. How would he go ? Think, impersonal characterisation ; think, and then don't do it. There is an actor on the other side ; think, and then don't do that either. Go like Arnold Brooke ; avoid the gesture——"

A waiter, seeing him standing, stepped forward. "You are waiting for your coat, sir ?" Arnold allowed the gliding of his eyelids to say "Yes" without interrupting his thoughts. "How would Arnold Brooke go ? In fear and trembling ; yes, but without a smile or they would know, and without a gesture. This waiter is giving me respite. Beware the gesture !"

The waiter laid the silk scarf across his shoulders and arranged his coat upon him as carefully as if he were made of eggshell. Then he moved the arm-chair upon which Arnold had been seated, and, parting the skirt of the overcoat, touched the long tails beneath,

more as if to assure himself that they had not fallen off than to avert creases. Arno stood tranquilly, his thoughts continuing. No, this was how the actor would prepare, and the patrician would make the gestureless exit. How would Arnold Brooke go in such circumstances? How would Arnold Brooke go——

The waiter passed him his hat, or, rather, placed it in the hand which retained the gloves, and then offered the stick with the silver ball. Not to have thought of it before! Arnold Brooke would not go at all; he would stay with this swine that it was possible to tolerate only because he was a swine of padded velvet.

He took the stick with the silver ball from the waiter. "Thank you," he said, "but I only wanted my coat. Bring me a *crème-de-menthe*." He placed his hat upon his head and sat down as the waiter moved away. His chair was farther from the table now, and he crossed his legs and touched the table with his toe. He wondered if one of them would ask if they should seek a table in the smoke-room, or if they would put the question with the eyes, or—and this would be awful—if they would remain and ignore him.

The liqueur was brought, and he paid the full tip for complete satiating service, yet not sixpence beyond. He rested the back of his hand upon the table, the short glass-stem between his fingers, and his thoughts played lance-like upon his judges, and then turned self intent.

Why, since he was Arnold Brooke, was his body not trembling? This temperamental quivering without the physical tremor was terrible. How was he to drink the liqueur? How would Arnold Brooke drink it? Had he to go through the whole thing again before he lifted the morsel of glass; the given point problem of what the earl would do, what the actor would do, what Arnold Brooke would do, only to find the answer when he had done the wrong thing?

The silence lasted.

De Valing wore an engraved signet-ring. He crooked his finger the better to see the crest of a lion upon the

stone. Mr. Sard was looking pensively at the young man who could not meet his gaze ; so much of thwarted affection was in it ; so much of Bennetta was in her father's face. Arnold felt that he must have sinned without knowing what his sin was.

"Do you know the lines which commence 'The shorn lamb crying for its——' " began de Valing, but Mr. Sard interrupted.

"Wait in the smoke-room while I speak to Mr. Brooke.

"Now," he said, when de Valing had tripped away, "have you anything to say or tell me ? "

"There is not anything which has not been said. *I am* a housepainter and an interloper ; de Valing is a cad. As before——"

"You understand that, although I do not censure you, I cannot let you engage my daughter's thought and attention ? "

"I understand, sir," said Arnold, as the gleam went out of life. "And—and thank you."

He rose, bowed, and walked to the street. Only one thought was in his mind, in his heart : "Bennetta ; what will Bennetta believe ? Bennetta ; what will Bennetta believe ? " He had failed to find the answer when he came to Chapel Grove. It seemed to him that the women grouped at the doorways of the Grove were more numerous to-night ; that they looked more rusted by the night shadows ; and that the light from the lamp at the entrance to the Grove breasted against the brick walls more grudgingly than usual, and varnished the faces of the groups a staler brown, as if it could destroy darkness but not create light.

The chatter ceased as he turned into the Grove. That was usual. The flat tablets of their faces were all turned towards him. He swung a glance round the groups ; he had always been pleased with his mother for not making one more in these "canting cliques." She was not among them now. He realised suddenly, with brushing of thought, that his coat was fallen open, revealing shimmer of satin lining and a stinted spread

of shirt-front. His hands twitched to fasten his coat, and he shuddered by reason of his negligence. He had been walking slowly. He continued to do so. He felt that the thoughts of these people did not flutter, they spread towards him.

There were certainly more people about to-night than was usual. It betokened, he concluded, that Mrs. Raddle's little tiff with Ernie had developed to one of those stupendous bi-monthly disagreements; that probably there had been the throwing of things—crockery and footwear. Well, thank goodness that she was as great a nuisance as she was, instead of half as much; it enabled him to ignore her.

He pushed open the gate and tapped the knocker. The door was opened by Mary Raddle.

Arnold looked at Mary in complexity of alarm and embarrassment; he could not decide if he were at the wrong house or whether she were in the wrong house. His first thought was that his introspection had walled him in so that he had not seen the necessary direction of his steps, his next thought that Mrs. Raddle and Ernie had excelled all previous "rumpuses" and Mary had sought protection from his mother.

He had lived for several years in the next house to Mary yet had never spoken to her. He knew nothing of her except that she was quiet in disposition, winsome of manner, and pretty with rather a delicious prettiness; that she never sang in her home; that she never picked buttonholes from her father's flowers; that she made her own dresses; that her footwear was never slovenly; that when she bought sweets they were usually in picture boxes; that she went three times a day on Sunday to chapel and sometimes during the week; that at one time she seemed about to be married, but the bluff, heavily-jowled man—Arnold had heard him called Mr. Carrol—who used to escort Mary home had ceased to do so.

Arnold in silence continued to look at Mary. She was dressed in a crossover dress of Roman stripes in which apricot and old rose predominated. Her face

was tender and sad ; fright was in her eyes—fright for him. She was silent, looking at him. Arnold's mind was too full of thoughts of Bennetta Sard for him to grasp quickly the situation.

"I've made a mistake. I've come to the wrong house," said Arnold, raising his hat and backing a step.

"No, this is your house."

"Oh," said Arnold.

"Yes," she replied, and blinked her eyes, with the perplexity of tears in readiness. The look pathetic suited Mary's type of prettiness. Arnold wondered if Bennetta, who did not rely on expression for beauty, would look beautiful in sorrow. He doubted if Mary's face would be pretty in repose. Mary was a windflower, much of whose appeal was in its sway and changing contour, in the accident of gliding shade and glancing light. Changeful and restless, its charm was the illusive-ness of its charm. Held to the glance, it told its prettiness swiftly and had no reserve of beauty. Bennetta Sard was as a passion flower, tranquil on a tranquil spray, into which a man might look and look, to which he might return, and yet not exhaust its wonder ; a vein, a tint, an emblem was ever miraculously new. She had the final gift of beauty, a refined intelligence which, showing in a face already beautiful, saves it when in repose from being negative beauty, and keeps it when vivacious—beauty without intensity.

Mary did not move to allow him room to enter.

Arnold raised his eyebrows.

"I thought perhaps you would guess after a minute," she said.

"Some trouble on?" asked Arnold, and his thoughts fled among the women watching in groups along the Grove. Then he made a sudden step. "Oh, it's *my* mother that something's the matter with. Now tell me—tell me. Don't break things gently. Let me come in. Has she—what is it?"

He stepped in and pushed the door to. It closed with a bang which seemed thunderous.

"She has been knocked over by a bicycle. The

doctor is with her now. Mother has gone for the district nurse."

The doctor's head appeared round the door to the kitchen. "Be quiet," he said.

"Can I help?" he asked. "I am her son."

"That makes a difference. She is worrying about you more than her leg."

"How serious is it, doctor?"

"The thigh bone is splintered. It would not be so serious in a younger woman, but an operation would do no good in this case. The bone would not knit; it would only be unnecessary pain. How old is your mother?"

"Sixty—er—sixty-eight. I have to reckon up. She was forty-four when I was born and I am twenty-four. Can I see her now?"

"Yes, but be quiet about it; remember she has had a shock beside the pain. And remember she does not know the bone is broken; I have only told her the leg is sprained."

"But how serious is it? Is she going to—— Is she going to——"

"Not for a long time yet, if she rests. She has a wonderful spirit, and that will help, but she will always be bedridden."

"Thank you, doctor. I will go in."

At first he could not see her, for the table was between him and the mattress which had been placed upon the floor to serve for a bed. As he moved around the table he saw that she was partly dressed, that she lay exhausted with pain—the broken fling-away of an unromantic street accident.

He knelt down beside her.

He saw the tremulous shadows aquiver round her lips, the appeal for him to understand in her beautiful grey eyes, over which the lids slowly rose and fell wearily with a sweep of shining lashes. He heard the miracle of bravery in the checked sobs of her breathing as she began to speak, and he was unutterably, unbearably proud of his mother.

He could not speak to her, and she took his silence for some vague accusation.

“Don’t be cross with me, Arno. I was miserable and lonely in the house by myself; the night seemed going on so long and so long. I only went out to buy a *Mail* to read. I don’t mind being left in; I don’t want to spoil your holiday. I did not ask them to send for you, Arnold; it was not me. I shall be all right if you go back to your friends. I am going to bed in a minute. The doctor says it is only a sprain.” The beads of perspiration gathered close upon her forehead; she made a movement with her hand from the wrist, as if she intended to do something and had forgotten what before it was done.

Chapter V

“ ANY fear of a job ? ”

Arnold looked up from his work to the man who had come to the door. He bunched his lips and shook his head, and said, without cheer, “ You can go through and ask the ‘ coddly ’ if you like.”

The man pushed past the pile of scaffolding plant which leaned against the door and entered the main body of the building. Arnold drew his breath through his teeth, as if a thought which he did not want had come. He looked at the point of his stencil knife and then rubbed it on the inch of oiled India stone at the side of his work.

He was sitting in the pay office of the Sollywell Picture House. Upon a table before him was a big sheet of glass, and upon that was the sheet of thick green paper from which he was cutting a stencil a yard square. There were one or two guiding lines on the paper, but he made the pattern up as he went along. He sharpened the four edges of the little arrowhead of a knife and felt the satisfaction of the sharp, cheesy cut of it as it sliced through the paper and skated cleanly on the bed of glass. The combination of a well-edged tool, a graceful design, and unhampered working space was his ideal state of work. He lifted the stencil, allowing the petals of the Tudor rose which he had just cut to fall through. He brushed them from the glass with the flat of his hand and resharpened the cutter. Then he made swiftly half a dozen ovals for seeds in the clasp of a pomegranate-shape.

“ Any fear of a job ? ”

Arnold’s knife slipped through a couple of pattern-ties.

"I shall have to turn that into a poppy head now," he thought, before he looked up.

In the doorway stood two unemployed painters, true to type. One was jovially wrinkled at the corners of the eyes, sandy moustached, big, broad, and plumply submissive to his body belt; the other was clean-shaven, lithe, and leanly alert. It was customary for painters to hunt work in pairs, and, as if selection of opposite attractions guided their choice of mates, nearly always one was full figured and cheerful while the other was lean and earnest. It was the jocose ones who employed the semi-comic, semi-tragic gambit of "Any fear of a job?" The earnest, anxiety-driven ones opened negotiations with "Much about?" or "Anything doing?"

"This is the only job we've got in," said Arnold, spreading a spot of oil over the stone with his thumb, "and we are squaring this up."

"I think this is the worst winter in the trade there's been," said the lean one.

"Every winter seems the worst when it comes," philosophised the stout one, and smiled without parting his lips. "And yet, when the spring comes, here we are to creep out again."

He was rather a fine man to look at; ones of the rounded type usually were; they kept the flush of the out-of-door work a little longer, and when their cheeks sagged a little towards January the modelling of their faces was not painful. Their eyes in almost every case were blue, and valiant, and English. All through the winter their philosophy held something of last summer's success and next summer's hope; but the lean one kept "till June December's snow."

The stout man walked up to the cutting table and looked at the stencil. "Cutting all the colours on one?" he asked.

"Mps," said Arnold. "The job was finished, they'd started to take the scaffolding down, and in comes the manager and thinks he'll have a square yard of stencil at the corner of each panel in the ceiling."

The scaffolders are securing the battings again while I cut. They're opening Monday."

"Poles?"

"No, loose swinging scaffold."

"Got a fag end?" asked the stout man.

Arnold grinned. "You don't want to smoke my fag ends," he said, and pulled a packet of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Good on yer, mate."

The lean man took one also, and by way of sham thanks said, "Lucky blighter!"

"If I was not lucky you would not be," said Arnold.

"You need not be so cocky," said the lean one.

"There's a long time to go yet before the spring."

Arnold was about to tell him he would be probably in the same position as the man himself by Monday, but he recollected there were possibly excuses for the man's froward bitterness.

"In the club?" demanded the lean man, concluding he had defeated the fortunate one and there now only remained the rout.

"No, I am not," said Arnold.

"Oh, that's how you keep your job, is it?"

"I am paid a penny above foreman's rate for doing decorating, so don't try and be funny."

"Dry up, Wilks," said the plump man. "You are singing early. You ain't 'ad to pawn your watch yet. Wait till you've put your boots in ticky and then there come a fall of snow and you can't go out and get a bob or two snow sweeping."

As the men left the room Arnold followed and closed the door. The booking office of a theatre or picture house and the vestry of a church were set aside for him when decorations were in hand, so that he might not be disturbed. He had a little boxroom of a designer's office up two flights of stairs above the office and show-rooms of the firm, but he most often worked where the work was in hand. There was not enough actual decorating done to keep him continually at that type of work. When he was not so employed he was put in

charge of private house work, and once he had superintended the painting of the G.P.O. pillar-boxes.

The door of the booking office opened, and Teddy Bonnington, the foreman in charge, came in. "How are you getting on, Brookey?" he asked. Arnold was called "Brookey" in the trade. "Who do you want to pounce it for you?"

"Any of the tall chaps—they have not raised the scaffold since it was walapered, have they? Then you had better have two of the tall ones, else it will be out of their reach for pouncing. Jimmy Dale and one of the others."

The foreman stood by Arnold watching him cut, and began to sing quietly a music-hall song which had caught the working-class fancy.

"Think it likely, Brookey, that the old firm's going to go bust?"

"Dunno," said Arnold glumly. "I would not lay my wages that they are not, Bonn."

"Well, if they do you can say you have four months' holiday in front of you. Brookey, painters never ought to marry."

Arnold glanced at Teddy Bonnington, who was one of the robust type, and a fine specimen. "I don't know," he said. "There are some fine men among them. Fine men as animals and good men as mates."

Bonnington shuffled with the uneasiness of a workman suspecting a compliment from his mate. "All the same," he said, "painters ought not to marry. There should be a law against consumptives, imbeciles, and folks with cancer, and painters marrying."

"It is not proved that cancer is hereditary. And if it was, they ought to marry and have children."

"Why?"

"See; a consumptive has five children. It misses one of them, and that one has five children; and again it'll skip one of them and he'll have five children; it ought to skip more than one by then, but, anyway, it should be fairly clear for those that come after."

"And all the while the others are spreading the disease," said Bonnington.

"I don't care. You look at the thing from the positive point of view; I look at the negative and reverse it to the positive. You say, or rather you mean, men who cannot afford to bring up children should not marry. Look at the men who can afford to have children; what do the children do? Develop a town like Birmingstow."

"Shall you marry?"

"Well, I'm a man; I suppose I shall," said Arnold. "Are you sorry you married and got three fine youngsters, Bonn?"

"* * * * the painting trade!" said Bonnington by way of reply.

"Here you are, the stencil's finished." The foreman took one corner of it and Arnold the other to carry it to the theatre. From the steel tie-rods, which spanned the arched ceiling, ropes were suspended holding a framework of scaffold-poles, on which was an open pathway of planks whereby the whole of the ceiling could be reached. This hanging scaffold outlined an area equal to that of the ceiling, and was prevented from swaying and so falling to pieces by four thick straits of wood, which were wedged between the scaffolding and the wall, two at either end of the building. The upright poles in tubs of earth, which had been necessary for security when a number of workmen were painting the ceiling, had been taken away before the manager decided to have the added ornaments in the corner of the panels.

"Hey! Dale—Long-'un! Put your kit down and come and give Brookey a hand," shouted the foreman.

Jimmy Dale stroked his varnish brushes off on the side of his kettle and put them under a seat, so that they should not be kicked over. He commenced to sing the last line of a song as he came near: "When the bells of the old church chime," which showed that he had been singing silently as he worked for some time. He climbed the ladder close on Arnold, keeping a raised

hand level with Arnold's lowered one to protect the big stencil which they carried between them.

Jimmy Dale tried the scaffold with his foot as he stood upon it. "You know they've only got this packed at the end with a bit of wood?" he asked.

"It's safe enough, else Bonnington would not send us up," said Arnold. "Will you hold the pattern in position while I pin it?"

"All right," said Jimmy resignedly, "but I don't want to find myself bump among the empties." He took the pattern in both hands, and, leaning back, stretched it on the ceiling above his head. "I'm in a good position if a bit of firewood at the end was to drop out, ain't I?"

Arnold raised himself to his toes and began to stick drawing-pins about the stencil to hold it taut. "What would happen if it did drop?"

"Oh, nothing," said Jim caustically, "nothing; only all the scaffold would swing towards where the struts dropped out—a good eight feet—and let the struts at the other end drop out. Then all the scaffold would swing that way back, like a pendulum, and as it swung the planks would drop out, and as they dropped the poles would slip out of the nooses, but we should not see that though; we should be somewhere on them iron-backed chairs below, waiting for the pictures to start on Monday. Oh, no, nothing would happen; the ropes would still be hanging from the spandrels. How long have I got to do the Chinese bend?"

There came a slight crunching sound, the ceiling glided above their heads as a landscape seen from a train gathering speed; then the ceiling seemed to glide back as if the train shunted; all this before there came the crash of the struts smashing the rails of the orchestra enclosure. Arnold had a glimpse of Jimmy Dale with hands trailing along the ceiling away from the pattern, gliding as the scaffolding glided; his own hands were over his head holding a pin. Time seemed casual and unhurried in the stupefaction of alarm. A grinding wrench beneath their feet, shouts, a wheeling

of poles, and an eddying of planks, as if the whole scaffold was a giant raft breaking to pieces in the current of a rapid, and space—space and the mind standing still, watching instead of thinking and telling what to do.

Arnold snatched at space as he flashed downward. He felt a terrible wrench upon his wrists ; a crack of muscles at his shoulders ; and the instinctive locking of his fingers over a steel rod. It was the spandrel which he had gripped in passing. Then his wrists seemed to be struck in two as his mate flung a desperate hold upon him, secured a grip, and stretched their two bodies taut with the weight of his coming down. And at that agonising moment the crash below shook the building.

Jimmy Dale had an elbow over one of Arnold's shoulders and one arm under his armpits, his hands gripping clothing. Arnold's mind was in his wrists.

The constant brushwork had made his wrists the strongest part of his body. The clothing began to tear. Jimmy gave a jerk and a drop, and locked his hands. "For God's sake hold tight, Jim," said Arnold.

At length men came with ladders and guided Jimmy Dale's feet to the rungs. With the taking away of Jimmy's weight Arnold almost loosed his grip, so painful was the relief. Arnold climbed down the ladder, and Bonnington chafed his wrists until he had the normal lack of sensation in possessing them.

"The boss will go mad when he sees this," muttered the foreman.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing. What can I do? Half the chairs and fittings in the place are smashed ; every wall is marked ; it looks like an earthquake. Feel all right, mate?"

"Ar. Don't move the ladder. I'm going up just once, to get my nerve back. Coming up, Jim?" asked Arnold.

"Couldn't. Not if you gave me your hatful of Jimmy-o'-Goblins."

"I should go up, Jim," advised the men. "You

know what it is if you don't. You never get your nerve back for any height if you don't go up straight on top of it."

"All right. Go up first, Brookey," said Jimmy Dale.

Arnold went up the ladder where it leaned on the spandrel, then he climbed through and stood upon the spandrel itself. It is quite usual for the men to walk the spandrel, steadying themselves with the flat of their hands pressed to the ceiling; custom had made height of no account. Arnold made a step or two in that manner.

"Remember your wrists are not up to their usual," called the foreman from below.

"Thanks for the tip, Bonn," said Arnold. He walked to the middle of the ceiling, returned, and reached to ease the pins from the stencil. He let the stencil hang as a sheet before him, took out the last few pins, and carried it down. The foreman took it, Jimmy Dale looked at the ladder, shook his head, and began to take off his overalls as he picked his way from the theatre.

There were about fifteen workmen gathered among the wreckage, but none had been struck by the falling timber. "Don't touch anything," said the foreman. "Let the boss see it just as it is. It is about his time for coming. There will be little hell to pop when he does come."

There was a stir among the chattering mob of people who had come from the street and gathered at the door. The workmen waited, according to their kind, in self-effacement; one or two pretended to be busy, picking up things and putting them down. Bonnington jumped over a staggering row of chair-backs from which the seats had been knocked and made headway towards the door. Arnold sat down on a pole and scratched his ear.

"What's this?" demanded the startled employer, letting his eyes travel over the shattered foreground. "You —— lot of fools, put your coats on and pack your

bags. Stop, Bonnington. I shall want you—and the scaffolder !”

According to their kind, the men began to whistle. Arnold looked at the wreckage. It seemed a setting fitly arranged to justify the employer's lapse into forceful English.

Arnold spoke to no one as he got clear of the theatre and into the street. He had never made a friend of any of his workmates, and it pleased him not to have to exchange condolences and complainings with them now. He knew sufficient of unemployment to know that most of the men of his trade lost their self-respect when they lost their work. It appeared to him that their self-respect was a fancy vest, easily slipped on and off with the smiling or clouding of sunny fortune, whereas with him it was a protective garment worn next his sensibilities always. He knew that if he lingered with the men the flare of their combined, cavilling impotence would react upon him until all his ideas for the future would be panic-stricken as horses in a burning stable. His was not a nature which found relief in an exuberance of self-pity.

Despondent, dulled of mental energy, blunted of initiative, lacking a finger-post, he reached Chapel Grove. And there was quiet. As he opened the front door he called softly, “It's only me,” in case his mother should be waking or sleeping. She did not reply, so it was to be assumed she slept. He sat down on a parlour chair with his arm on the dresser which had been converted to a bookcase. The room was different to others in Chapel Grove, more by reason of the things which it did not contain rather than those which it did. The walls were not covered with photographs and souvenirs of Blackpool in frames of seashells or velvet. They were rather bare of pictures ; papered in pattern stripe of brown and fawn from a picture-rail run round level with the door-top, and with the frieze and ceiling cream, they looked well inside the lines of good taste. The furniture was not ornamental, and ornaments had been got rid of in so far as vases, cushions,

dangling cloths with lace on, and all the other dust accumulators beloved in Chapel Grove were concerned. It was the lack of things which pleased in the room.

Arnold looked round the room with its negative ornamentation. More of his mother's personality than his own was expressed in the room. He had bought none of the household furniture. Everything was from his father's and mother's first home. But he felt there was a difference in the room to-day; chairs were set cornerwise in the angles; the carpet square was turned round a different way; someone had stayed in the room, and it was changed. Of course, it was Mary. Few things are so ready to take alteration from unwitting strangers as living-rooms; few things so easily are turned from their original and fundamental scheme as a designed room. Arnold had discovered that when first he had drawn up schemes of decoration for the customers of the Paintplex Decorating Company. He had entered into the work as an idealist, thinking that by leaving an atmosphere of art in a Birmingham home he was, although in little, helping the city to prepare for fulfilment of her boast of culture. And he had seen that after a household had once had breakfast in a wedgwood room and nailed up a hunting scene pipe-rack, it suggested nothing; but that when they had had ten breakfasts it would begin to take personality and suggest something more like a nasturtium room. Arnold had swerved from ideals in his work. A customer was capable of anything—would put a bouquet of orchids in a russet room which asked for mignonette.

Mary had moved in the parlour, and it was different; not better, not worse; different. So it was in the household. Mary threw in a suggestion of control and kept balance. Arnold did not know what state the house would have been reduced to if Mary had not been so marvellously kind—inexplicably kind. At first, when she had spent each evening in the week attending to his mother and her week-ends in shopping and “putting the house to rights,” he thought she did it

partly as an excuse to escape from her own home, but he saw later that it was because she was fond of his old mother. Mrs. Raddle showed the best side of her nature in the Brookes' distress. She sanctioned Mary's assistance. She herself came in during the daytime at intervals and obeyed the behests of the district nurse. But Mary's devotion to his mother seemed so deep that Arnold believed there must be other causes besides his mother's quiet charm.

He had said to Bonnington, "Well, I'm a man ; I suppose I shall marry." Now as he looked at the chairs across the corners of the room he thought, not of she who had touched them, but of Bennetta Sard ; thought of her with slow misery, and then passed to the secret room of his heart and touched the spring of memory, and entered. He stayed but a little while—long enough to turn the picture of Bennetta Sard face to the wall.

"I'm a man ; I suppose I shall marry some time," he said, rising. "When I get work again." Without thinking what he was doing he crossed to the chairs and pushed them with his knee to their customary position against the wall. He walked to the kitchen. It led from the parlour by a little passage confined in length to the width of the pantry under the stairs. The light in the kitchen was divided and toned by a high folding screen which hid the bed under the window.

He laid back a fold of the screen to see if indeed his mother was sleeping. He did not drop his glance to the bed ; he looked through the window. It faced on to a bricked yard, shut in by boards, and beyond was a touselled garden. Half-way along the yard his mother was clinging to the corner brickwork. Her face was grey and her eyelids were slowly sinking.

He stood riveted to the spot by the horror of the picture in his mind—the picture of a broken bone crossing and recrossing its splinters in a living thigh as she had made progress to where she now stood. He could not move an inch to reach her, although she was about to fall ; power of movement had left him.

She had dressed herself clumsily and worked her feet into slippers, and, although now exhausted, her frail face was graced with strong lines of endurance and dauntlessness by her masterly will. Her eyes closed completely; her face lost all its strength in pitiful defeat; and she sank towards the wall. Arnold was petrified. He could not move—*he could not*.

He heard steps in the passage, the door opened, and Mary entered the yard. She rushed and picked his mother from the wall. She began to scold and pet the invalid, and, as if a gentle dew should dissolve a metal which pain of acid could not even stain, Arnold's mother trembled to tears—tears of impotency; the first he had known her shed.

He hurried out then. His mother had never seemed so little before. He found which way was safe and best to lift her, and carried her into the house and rested her upon the bed. He rose from her couch in silence and walked into the scullery, and wrestled with his emotion until it was thrown and his foot was upon it.

Mary was giving a little brandy and water to his mother, who looked like a child in disgrace at Arnold when he entered. He sat on the end of the box fender which touched the bed and rested his elbow upon the pillow.

"Why did you do it, mother?" he asked. "*Why did you?*"

"If I never make a start I'll never get about again. I must learn to get about. I am a nuisance to myself and everybody else like this. If it's rheumatics following on a sprain, as the doctor says it is, it's sure to hurt if I walk on it; but if I don't walk it will grow stiff, and I shall lose the use of it altogether." She seemed to be asking a question or answering one; anything but making a statement. She sighed, the thin sigh of absolute exhaustion.

A dark mass out side the window; it was Mrs. Raddle. She flattened her face to the pane to see who was within. She entered, and examined each one with a glance. "Mm!" she ejaculated, and then with

heavy jocularity said to the invalid, "Glad he's come home early, ain't yer?"

"Yes," said Arnold's mother.

Mrs. Raddle regarded her stepdaughter. "I heard yer come up the hollow entry," she said sourly. "You couldn't come into your own home first to save your blessed life could yer? If I was you I'd bring me bed here."

This was the type of garrulousness which Arnold wished to avoid in his home. He had no knowledge as to whether Mary was a girl of spirit who would prolong the engagement, or whether, by quietly accepting immediate defeat, she would defeat conquest.

"No occasion to bring my bed," she said. "I could sleep at the side of Mrs. Brooke. I'd be near in the night then. I have thought about it before. I think I will. I shall; a man's not the proper person to do everything."

"Oh, indeed," said her stepmother. "Who's going to give house-room to your falderals while you do the Florence Nightingale here? Suppose you'll be running in and out all hours for 'em. I suppose you think I don't do enough; you have to come home afore your time, and the dress shops busy keeping all hands overtime." Mary worked as a ladies' tailoress.

"They are that busy they can do without me," said Mary. "I've told them so this afternoon. You've never been a mother to me, and now I've found one. I'm going to see her right before I leave her. I know about Mr. Brooke and all that; but it's his mother's house, and she's asked me."

"If it was me who had had me leg broke——" began Mrs. Raddle, and stopped, alarmed at what she had said. Three pairs of eyes glanced rapidly at Mrs. Brooke. But the exertion had exhausted her; she was unconscious.

"Not that it 'ud 'a mattered," said Mrs. Raddle. "Her knows; her's known all along her leg was broke, only her ain't let on so as to stop you worrying."

"She could not have known," expostulated Arnold. "She walked on it this afternoon."

"Did her? And what's that prove?" demanded Mrs. Raddle.

"That she did not know her leg was broken or she would not have had the foolish courage," said Arnold, a great fear in his mind that it might not prove it.

Mrs. Raddle pushed by Mary, who was attending the invalid, and, laying her hand out in space as if it rested on the top of an invisible pedestal near Arnold's chin she snapped, "If you don't understand your mother by now, you never will."

"What do you mean?" asked Arnold, tensely.

"I mean, her don't want to be a trouble to you; and you ain't worth it." She withdrew from the house in a chariot of accomplishment.

Chapter VI

IN the weeks which followed Mary's decision to make her habitation in Mrs. Brooke's house Arnold had ample opportunity to consider what kind of a girl she was, what kind of a woman she would grow into under fair conditions and unfortunate ones, and what type of wife she would make. He considered her dispassionately, almost as if he were selecting a wife for a well-wished friend in whom he was only slightly more interested than in the girl he examined.

Once that he realised that he was critical of Mary, he arrested the progress of examination to ask himself why. As one side of his brain asked the question, the other side answered it in dual thought. "I am a man, I must marry some day or other. But it is rather abominable to be so cold-blooded about it."

"What of love should I forgo if I rule my choice by commonsense selection? There is love like heroines and heroes have; that rather spectacular, all-in-all love, which sells novels. I can afford to lose that. I have loved Bennetta in a grander way, and I do not admire the novelette brand. The fact that it struggles for similar love in return takes away its crown. The fact that it puts possession as its highest reward places it on the level of calculating impulses. It is flesh-mercenary—three parts passion and one part spiritual vanity. I doubt if it will survive the test of possession; it burns itself away in flame, beautiful dazzling flame, before it has lit the coals of life. So much for the *grande passion*. I shall miss that easily if I wed Mary. I could not feel like that towards her. I doubt if I could feel like that towards any woman. That type of love may be safely left to poets and book writers. It

would last the length of time of a book writing if it was not satisfied before the last chapter was in the author's brain. I am glad that that love exists ; I would not read a book that has not got it for its basis ; but in life I have loved Bennetta Sard in a nobler way.

“ Then should I forgo that everyday love which makes for the happiest marriages if I wed Mary ? No. That is just what I should be getting. Let me go over the steps to be sure. A man comes to the time when, because he is a man, he desires to marry, or to the time when he feels the early promptings. He likes several girls. Any of them would permanently please the animal in him. He distrusts those that please it most ; he wants a spiritual and mental companion incorporated in with the private companion. That limits his selection. He also wants a helpmate according to circumstances, a housewife or a hostess according to his finances, and in any case he wants a healthy woman—for that type of love—the hundred per cent. love of a man wishful to be a goodly husband. This limits his choice again to a smaller number—he does not know how *his* love selection works any more than the novelette lover—and of the smaller number one or other has a little trait which catches his particular fancy, or he courts one for a time and changes over to another. He meets little things in the girl's character which he had not expected ; they surprise him ; he or she give way upon the points, religious or what not ; the girl becomes a habit to him, and then a necessity, and then a wife. They are married. Then comes the battle between all the things which the common sense of the commonsense mate-seekers has prompted them to hide from each other before, but which they no longer choose to hide. There are about two years' miserable struggling, which, if their common sense survives, gives place to the real, beautiful knowledge of each other's failings—happiness which has to be earned. It is a greater love than the other ; it is ignorant and enduring ; no roses are red enough to wreath it. And the struggle does not always last years ; often there is a blessing which shortens the time

before the realisation of love comes—a child, or poverty, or trouble.

“ I know that I should not miss that love with Mary. She is fast becoming a habit. She bears with me now in poverty. But—should—I—lose—great—love ; that for which there is no argument ; that which I have for Bennetta ? Never. Never can I lose that. If ever I marry, whatever life deals to me, I shall have that mystery of love in my heart. I have never thought on marriage with Bennetta Sard. It is enough that I love her. Because I am a man I shall marry—marry someone else—and still have that love for Bennetta Sard. I do not love her with my body, no more than a man loves God with his body. I do not love her with my mind no more than that either. ‘ Soul ’ is a word that has been stuck on every bit of emotional furniture like an auction-room label, but that is the nearest that I can get to what in me loves Bennetta Sard ; that which, if my body were torn open and my heart laid bare, would rush straight through space to her to see if she were happy. I know no other kinds of love.

“ I do not care what the world would say of a man placed like me claiming to be an authority on love, but I have loved in the holiest fashion. I cannot consider love for anyone else except by comparison. To contemplate any other of her sex brings my thoughts direct to her.”

Arnold did not expect great connubial bliss whomever he married. He gained too much insight into middle and working class matrimonial matters to hope for that. He gained the knowledge in the course of his daily work, which took him within the covering walls of hundreds of homes in the course of a year. Reticent of revealing incompatibility before servants as a misallied middle class man and wife are, they do not often practise smiling subterfuge before the workman in the house ; possibly because decorative and repair work provide a bone of contention between them—taste versus taste ; ornament versus comfort ; luxury versus thrift ; “ a champagne taste versus a gin income ” ; the woman wants

what the man can do without, the man wants what the woman not only can do without, but what she strongly objects to, and the workman feels the double pull, even if he is not called on to arbitrate by providing trade experience.

Possibly the paperhanger in the midst of the workman's family gains so much insight as to the position of marital affairs because every man and his wife show the worst sides of their natures when the domestic hearth is upset. So many people lose their presence of dissembling when the house is not as it is accustomed to be.

Possibly also a workman is not considered worthy of deluding, because he only enters a household for a few days of a lifetime and would not be likely to carry impressions to anyone who would matter.

In the lower levels of Birmingstow society, far from the workman in their midst being a creature from whom knowledge had to be throttled down, he was welcomed as an escape valve to let free pent-up sense of injuries. No spot of a house was sacred from the workman ; he had to paint the corner where the rubbish was swept, to whitewash underneath the shelf where the empty bottles were thrust ; to hang paper on every wall that hid the man and woman from the man and woman next door. When he had done this he had to go and meet in similar circumstances the man next door on either side. So that when he left the vicinity of the home where knowledge of it had been thrust, or had thrust itself, upon him, whatever remained unknown, the bad did not. Then, as if for comparison, he had to go to another house, and then to the minister's, and then the shopkeeper's, and then the public-house at the corner, and then the house where lived the man's foreman, and then the home of the woman's charwoman ; week in week out, hundreds and hundreds of Birmingstow homes telling themselves to his reflective nature, as if he were a librarian who scamped reading of all the books which his work made him notice.

This servant-knowledge, eye-at-the-keyhole information, made Arnold deduce that a man should marry,

but should not expect perennial happiness to follow ; that it would profit his happiness to obtain children as soon as possible ; that he should not unduly fear poverty if love gave him happiness, love being a plant which thrived in stony soil ; that a man should marry in his own class ; that it was trifles and not things of paramount importance which made for disaster ; that if he could bear with trifles for two years he could win to contentment.

To this philosophy of marriage he had always put in parenthesis, " Everything depends upon the fitness of the woman to be a particular man's wife ; the wrong woman upsets every calculation. Respect on both sides must be there. Love is sometimes a handicap to married happiness. If it is there on both sides before marriage, it will need to be pulled down and rebuilt on a new plan to something which meets better the requirements of a married couple. No woman is an angel ; be grateful if she can cook and keep a house clean and leave you alone when you want to be left alone."

Mary proved in a week that she could cook and keep a house clean and not demand a preoccupied man's attention. To Arnold, she seemed the right woman for the working man. He pitied her or any woman who married him, for, in addition to his having so paltry a trade in his fingers, his impulses were confined in the circle of the artistic temperament which enclosed love instead of love enclosing the temperament. He pitied the woman he should marry, because there was so much of love he could not give. Bennetta Sard would always possess his spiritual love. Fortunately, few wives valued that love, even if they did insist that it went not elsewhere ; fortunately also they did not look for it, or signs of it coming to or going from them ; they were so busy guarding all the other loves but that one love. Arnold deemed that he could give Mary these lesser loves, amounting to the everyday love which makes for happy marriage.

As Arnold saw Mary with his mother a new revelation of woman's nobleness came to him. She was patient,

tender, and yet ever controlling with a wise control. No task of nursing was so ignoble that affection for his mother did not make it sacred. She knew nothing of nursing but what is given to woman instinctively. She learned the first duty of the heroic profession—to smile and be cheerful.

On the day that Mary had found his mother standing in the yard Mrs. Brooke had a stroke which paralysed the right side, so that there was no fear of her attempting to walk again. The paralysis reached towards her brain, and she wandered in her mind, reverting to past times in her life of which Arnold knew nothing. She mistook Mary and Arnold for various people she had known as a child, and in these wanderings she was happy. She must have had a happy childhood.

It was well that Mrs. Brooke did not know the distress that was in her house. Arnold had no work, and could obtain none. There was a little, very little money that his mother had set by at the time of her husband's death for a purpose—that she might be buried with him. That was altar gold, not to be touched for lesser purposes.

Mary seemed to have marvellous method and discretion in laying out money. Arnold was unable to give her any after his week's wages following the day of the picture-house accident, yet there was no lack of necessities, only careful avoidance of waste, and Arnold burned with shame when he ate. It seemed to him at the end of a month that the money must have gone, and his mother's store as well. He trembled with fear of asking Mary if it was so, but he knew that the indecision of not knowing how many counters of food-buying, rent-paying silver were left was worse than the actual knowledge.

He knew he must ask. He asked upon a Monday morning—the morning that the weekly rent became due. The rent was only seven shillings and threepence ; it was not much : it was a formidable sum. Mrs. Brooke had never had a debt in her life. If by reason of the rent collector's calling at irregular times she had missed him, she would travel to the estate agents' office in the

centre of the city, often at great inconvenience, that the entry might be made in her rent-book on the correct date ; yet she knew that it would not have mattered if she had been a month in arrears. She kept her series of green cardboard rent-books, from her earliest married year to this, in a stack with variegated green edges beside the family Bible upon the round mahogany table, where anyone could take them up and see the perfect record. Each stiff card was a chapter of the novel of her life, a book which only she could read.

The entries in the yellowish-green card wrote her most arduous chapter. The entries in copying pencil were made when she had the money ready ; those in ink were made when she had not been able to get the rent until late in the day, and had had it entered at the office desk. In that chapter was the period where her husband had been thrown out of work, and where he made wooden clothes-horses, with hinges of webbing, in the attic. As she read it she heard the muffled hammering while she was rubbing in the tub the washing that she was taking in. In that chapter was the jam smell of brown sugar which she was boiling to toffee, to put in the front window and sell in farthingworths at eight ounces a penny ; the pungent smell of troach, the cleanly smell of peppermint as the rock was pulled white on a hook on the door. There was a piece of that chapter written nearly all in ink ; it was where five pounds had been paid for the toffee recipes, the stone to roll the toffee on, and instruction in making. She could have had all the entries following in copying pencil had she decided to depart from her principle. She had been offered quantities of sugar on trust, but she preferred to buy a pound, make it into toffee, and sell it quickly, and buy another pound, until at the end of a day, with six or seven boilings, she had enough for three pounds ; and so increased until at the end of the week she had enough for many pounds of sugar, but had to start with one pound again because the rent was due.

And in that chapter her first-child Richard was born.

The next chapter—a grass-green rent-book—was torn; that was little Richard. In that chapter she heard people passing the door and saying, “Oh, what a lovely little crater!”

The next chapter was also grass green. It might have been signed at the doorstep on a rainy day, for the entries were blurred with a hundred drops. There were the most terrible of her entries in that book. It was in ink. She had taken the book to the office and left Richard in charge of a neighbour. The book had been signed. When she was away, Richard—beautiful limbed, curly, golden-headed, honey-singing little Richard—had been allowed to fall down a flight of stairs and was killed. And the next entry was terrible with a different smite; her husband had taken suddenly to drink. His son had been too dearly loved to be broken without his being broken also. A less loving father might have waited for another son. The best men have only one strand in their character, and the one strand of Richard’s father was snapped. The mother, left with that great, crying, reaching impulse of the bereft mother, had the great heart-sobbing child who was her husband to cloak with her otherwise useless, protective mother love. For many years a world of souls bemused by discipline looked on and did not know how fine a man Jeffry Brooke was, and some of them never knew.

There was a chapter—a rent-book green as green ink new upon the paper—which opened with a thought of a happiness. Arnold was promised to be born, and Jeffry Brooke, turning back to his innate nobleness, squared his chivalry of heart once more, never handled a tankard again, and waited for a son. Arnold was born, born of a father who had no little faults and could do that with his great fault—throw it in a single bout. And in that chapter it was written that his foundation came too late to build upon; it was found that he had a cancer.

All of that novel was written for Arnold’s mother to read in the variegated stack of cardboards. It was

written for her to read elsewhere—in the nature of *Arnold*.

On this Monday morning Arnold walked into the parlour to think. He picked up the top rent-book, shook it open, glanced at it, replaced it. He bit his lip at the side and tried with intent thought to fathom fate. He had not inherited from his mother her pride of being debt-free, but he had her dread of a hanging debt, small or large. He knew that he must find out what money was to hand, or if none.

He passed into the kitchen. He glanced to see if his mother was awake or conscious. The bed was under the window, and the head of it was against the grained cupboard fixture, so that his mother could see through the window when she wished without being raised. His mother's eyes were open, and she was gazing at the ceiling abstractedly. Her white silk hair was parted in the middle of her forehead and lay in two heavy plaits, one over either shoulder and the counterpane. Arnold knew now how beautiful her face was. By the grandeur of her profile she might have been an old marchioness; there was dignity in each line, and beauty in the whole. Her tranquil grey eyes glowed without verve—great, child-loving eyes that had the beauty of their own childhood restored.

The fingers of her one hand were moving among the folds of the bedspread. Arnold turned to Mary, who was ironing on the table. He whispered, "Isn't it supposed to be a bad sign when they pluck at the counterpane?"

"She is sewing," said Mary.

Arnold looked. It was not the movement of the imaginary needle which he was used to seeing. Mary laid the iron on the upturned saucer to prevent scorching the cloth. She knelt beside the bed, and, stroking the worn, slim fingers, said, "How are you getting on with it, mother?"

"I'm fetching the tacking threads out," said Arnold's mother. She paused in her imagined task and felt about the bedspread, then, seeming to find what she

sought, she said, "Here is a pin." Mary made movement as if she took it. "Here is another," said Arnold's mother.

Arnold moved. "Is that my Arno?" asked his mother.

"Yes, mother," said Arnold, glad that she knew him again. Mary moved so that Arnold could take her place.

"Can I help you, mother?" he asked.

"Yes, thread me this needle," she begged. "Your eyes are younger than mine, and my other hand has gone to sleep. I don't know what has come over it lately."

He pretended to take a needle from between her thumb and finger and made the movements of threading it where she could see his hands, and assumed to place it between her fingers again. Then he kissed her while she knew it was him.

"Will you turn the lamp up, Arnie? I can hardly see," she said. "I think it's warmed the chimney by now."

He went to the gas bracket and fumbled there with his fingers. "Is that better?" he asked, but she was either asleep or unconscious.

Mary was sprinkling water on the bone-dry sheet before she ironed it. She was wearing a thin black overall kind of dress on which there were twinklings of black beads in an antler pattern at the opening for the neck, and it made Mary's face seem a little haggard. There was pale pansy shading beneath her eyes, and her cheeks were stroked thinner than they had been. There were shallows in her face, but her mouth did not droop.

"Has mother any money left?" asked Arnold.

Mary picked the iron up from before the fire and held it to her cheek to test the warmth. She gave Arnold a swift glance as the iron flushed her cheek. Then she laid the iron before the bars of the grate again and shook her head.

"What time does the rent man come," asked Arnold tiredly.

“Nigh on twelve.”

“I have not a thing left to sell. I cannot give my pictures away at any price, however I try.”

“No ; times are bad,” said Mary, but she did not sigh.

Arnold turned to the stair door in the corner. He hesitated with the knob in his hand. “Do we owe anybody anything for food and stuff yet ? ”

“No,” said Mary. “We are on the safe side so far.”

Arnold went up the stairs. When he returned he had brown paper parcels under his arms. Mary was not in the kitchen, and he did not call to her as he left the house.

Despite the awkwardness of carrying the bundles of clothes under his arms, he walked far from his own district before he decided on which pawnbroker’s shop to enter. He went to the one at the corner of Brail Street and Cotton Lane. He walked swiftly down the street and almost leapt into the lane, as if he had stolen goods upon him. Once in the lane he slunk along to the side-entrance of the pawnbroker’s shop, flung a hunted look to either end of the lane to see if any acquaintance or stranger was witness to his shame and degradation, and pushed into the cubicle marked “Loan Office.”

It was gratifyingly dark in the cubicle. The smell of the shop suggested a rag doll soaked all night in gutter-water. There was a wooden partition on one side and a woman’s head and hat came round the end inquisitively from the next cubicle. She was evidently a customer, for she dodged back as Arnold bumped the bundles on the counter. He began to take off his overcoat. A whiskered man, looking like a circus performer—the Kidglove Lioneater—came up from a trap in the floor. He poked his finger into the parcel and said, “What y’r got ? ”

“Three suits and an overcoat,” said Arnold.

“No good ! ” said the man.

“No good ? They are,” said Arnold.

“No good to me, anyway. Nor to anybody else as keeps a loan office. None of ’em are taking any more

clothes in. The place gets choked up with 'em. It's right enough. You'll find everybody's refusing them now."

"Will you take pictures?" asked Arnold.

"Not me. Look at the stuff in the window, if you want to know what's wanted."

Arnold plucked at the strings which bound the bundles. Then he shrugged, and, picking them up, came out to the narrow confines of Cotton Lane. The church clocks chimed twelve. It came to Arnold's mind that Mary would think he had purposely absented himself from the house at the time the rent-collector was expected, on purpose to avoid the unpleasant task.

"Look here," he said to the man, "you don't mind if I leave these parcels for a while, do you? I want to get home quick."

"Throw 'em over," said the man. Arnold did so and hurried out.

It seemed to him of paramount importance that Mary, who shouldered so much of his responsibilities, should not condemn him for the cowardice of avoiding an irksome interview which there was no necessity for him to leave to her.

As he entered the house he came upon Mary in the parlour. "Has the rent man been?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

Arnold relaxed his limbs; he sagged into a chair and tapped his foot against the fender. "What did he say?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Mary.

"Nothing!" exclaimed Arnold in amazement, leaning forward in the chair. "Old Squeaky Poltney said nothing? Didn't he ask you why we could not pay?"

"No." She turned her head right away from him, and her fingers plucked at the jet beads on her breast, wrenching them off, letting them spatter to the floor.

Arnold jumped up from his seat and whisked the top rent-book from the pile. He scanned it and clasped it together in his one hand. The rent had been paid.

Arnold walked slowly round to where Mary stood.

With a touch he stayed her fingers from plucking the beads. She moved a step backwards, and, putting her hands to her face, began to cry quietly, as if she were a chidden child.

He waited for a minute—a full minute—and then he said, “Mary, you paid the rent out of your own pocket. Did you?”

She nodded.

“You have been keeping this house going for a week or more. Have you?”

Again she nodded. She sought about her dress for a handkerchief, but could not find one. He found his and passed it to her, and she dried her cheeks.

“Mary,” he said, looking down upon her, “when I am in work again will you marry me?”

“I was afraid you would think I did it for that when you found out,” said Mary, crumpling the handkerchief into a ball. “I did not! I did not! I did it because your mother is lovely. She’s just like having one myself.”

“I know you did not do it for that. I ask at an unfortunate moment. I have meant to ask you for a long time, only I have so little to offer, and there is so much trouble about. But will you marry me? I think we ought to be happy—given a fair chance.”

“But you don’t love me, and you know you don’t,” said Mary.

Arnold was beginning to be rather puzzled by the girl. She was no longer tearful. She made her last statement with as little emotion as if they were discussing what blacking was best for giving a polish to boots.

“What makes you think that?” he asked.

“It’s true. You don’t love me. You treat me too much as if you were a gentleman for that.”

“Mary!” exclaimed Arnold, shocked. “You do not mean that I treat you as if you were a servant?”

“No! No, no. I mean you treat me as if I were your mother’s daughter but not your sister. But under any circumstances I could not marry you. I am engaged to marry Mr. Carrol. I am going out to

Canada to him in the spring. So you see I could not marry you."

A great flaming of momentary happiness burst in Arnold's heart. He knew in this moment, when his suit was rejected, what it would have taken him slow years to find out if his suit had been accepted—that, loving Bennetta Sard as he did, he would know no true joy with any other woman. That life could be bearable for him without her only if he lived it alone.

Then swiftly came the realisation of the debt he was under to Mary. He started as the thought swept upon him. "We cannot go on taking your money off you, Mary," he said. "I don't expect you have much, and what you have you will need when you go over there."

"I won't," said Mary. "Listen. It's worth all I have to get away from my stepmother for a month or two. I intended to do it another way before Mr. Carrol and I met. I have been putting aside and putting aside to start a business of my own—rent a shop and fit it up. I should have done it by now only I am going to be married. I put it off for a time. I have plenty—plenty till it's all over."

"Despite all that," said Arnold, and there was a break in his voice, "we cannot take your money."

"You can. You will have to for her sake. And, anyway, I will not leave your mother, whatever you say or do. I never had one to remember. And—it won't be long now."

Arnold looked stupefied at the girl.

"Mary!" It was Arnold's mother calling.

"You see," said Mary. She went from the room.

Arnold stooped and picked up the beads one by one. He looked at them in his palm. Then he let them trickle to the floor, tattooing with the sound of quick rain. "So much," he said slowly, "so much for my philosophy of love."

Chapter VII

ALL days became the same to Arnold ; Sundays were week-days ; he guessed at the months. He did not know what to do nor where to go for work ; his own trade hibernating, he applied with less and less hope for work of other kinds. As once he had struggled for employment in more respected callings, now he desperately sought work in the most menial occupations ; and nothing came of it. Christmas came and went, a date among the days. It made an opening on the string of clumsy wooden days like a cracked imitation pearl, hollow to the view. A fog of hopelessness gathered round Arnold, leaving him mentally groping, touching nothing real ; making him blind to everything save shame, the diffident shame of the man who wants work and cannot obtain it.

Sometimes he stood still in one or other of the rooms in his home and tried to wake up from the reality as if it were a dream. It was not only unemployment which created this grotesque state of existence ; there was the impossible situation of his mother's living and living on weeks after the doctor had said she was practically dead. The doctor had said that she would live a day, no more ; and she had lived for a week. Then he had said that she could not live many hours longer as gangrene had set in ; and she had lived—lived, breathing and suffering, although the extremities of her feet were taken by mortification. And it had appeared not only on the paralysed side which did not feel it. Mary fought with it—a tangible thing to be fought. A mad, heroic battle it was.

And his mother lived on. The doctor said that he had never known of such a will as Arnold's mother's,

"Then," said Arnold, "is it possible that if one's will is powerful enough that one can stave off death for so long? Six weeks now."

The doctor stretched his hand towards the bed. "There is the proof," he said.

"But, doctor, how can her will operate? She is unconscious of her surroundings; she does not eat; her accident has hastened senile decay; she has not strength to move; how can it be her will? She knows nothing except the pain boring through her unconsciousness. How can it be her will without knowledge?"

"It is her wonderful will-power," said the doctor, with finality.

Sometimes, with slight horror of himself, Arnold wondered why the low, perpetual moaning of his mother did not cause him anguish; why it was no more to him than the ticking of a clock to which he had grown so accustomed that he had to pause and listen to hear if it had not stopped; if he were callous; if it meant that, despite of what he believed, he did not love his mother. He wondered if it was because, knowing he could do nothing to alleviate the pain, he was unmoved by it in wisdom. None of these questions did he answer; the dull fog which had settled round him left him without insight to answer questions.

And then, amazingly, was given him a chance to answer one of his questions. It was a chance to alleviate the pain. The doctor offered to supply a narcotic by which his mother should sleep, but Arnold had to sanction its use before it was given. The district nurse advised that it should be given. Mary, white-faced, said that if it was for her to decide she could not sanction it. Mrs. Raddle demanded with righteous fury that Arnold should give his "Yea." She grew ravenously vehement, with vulgar declamation, before a stone-faced Arnold whom she had not known before; an Arnold, neither disdainful nor captious, who told her that it was not her affair; who said it only once, and then let her rave. For Arnold had said "No."

He had said "No" without hesitating for consideration, but the conflict of thoughts came later. "Do I refuse because I fear that she might not wake? Would not that be for the best? This comes within range of my special cowardice, but it is not fear, I still can say 'Yes'—once; but I have to say 'No' hundreds of times; every moment as she moans. Is it because I love her too much to run the risk? It cannot be, or I should have hesitated before I answered. It is because I would not limit by a breath that glorious heroine-will. Please God she has given it to me. If ever there comes a day when, having it, I use it to hold back death until something more important than life is accomplished, and it is given to anyone who loves or hates me to obliterate my will by a single word, may he not say it as I will not now; and if I weaken, hearing her suffering, may he give the sign. O God, let me be my mother's son."

It was evening, and he stood in the front room. A ray from the lamp at the end of the avenue streaked the wall with uncertain light; the remainder of the room was dark. He paused in his thoughts and began them again.

"It is possible," and he uttered the words softly, "it is possible that since she wills to live, it is for something. If she would only——" He stopped, as if a bell had rung clamorously; his mother had ceased to moan.

He listened. It must be so; he could hear nothing; nothing after all these days and nights. Mary was not in the house. She was shopping. He went swiftly to the door which led to the kitchen.

The light was full on and a fire was blazing. A kettle was steaming and singing. He walked cautiously into the kitchen; hoping, fearing, he knew not what.

"You have been a long time coming, Jeffry."

His mother was speaking tenderly, without plaint of reproach, gentle welcome in her voice. She was looking at Arnold. He went swiftly to her and put his arms around her, not knowing what were best to say.

He said no word. He did not let her see his face, lest, finding her son, she should lose her husband. He felt her kiss his cheek with happy wistfulness. Her quiet breathing told him that she was in a different, sweeter sleep than any which had blessed her for so many weeks.

He rose and cut from a newspaper a shade to hang around the gas globe that the light should not fall disturbingly upon her eyes. He reeled a spindle-backed chair round on to its leg towards him, while he looked to see if his movements had disturbed the lightness of her sleep. She slept on with childlike peace. He sat down upon the chair sideways, his one arm hanging over the back, and watched her. He was glad to still be looking at her; glad that he had not sanctioned artificial sleep.

He looked at her for a long time without moving his position, that he might keep within the locket of the years to be the picture of her face. Each contour of her face was a line of dignity. Her hair was resplendent silver waved and spread as that of a careful headdress of a Pompadour court lady; but her lashes were dark and silky and heavy. Her mouth was a little child's, curved in love of modest pleasures. She opened her eyes; it was miraculous to him that her suffering had not touched their loveliness of grey. He did not move; he knew—he believed—she could not see him.

“Is that my Arnold?” she asked.

“Yes,” he whispered. Then, believing she would not hear, he was about to speak more distinctly, but she smiled contentedly.

“What time is it?” she asked.

He was bewildered by her unexpected naturalness. He raised his glance to the mantelshelf. The clock, which stood in a wooden case with a glass front painted in representation of a church window, had stopped. He hazarded the correct time. “Eight o'clock,” he said.

“Where is Mary?” she asked.

"She has gone out to get things for to-morrow's dinner," he said, and added, lest it mattered, "she will not be long."

Arnold was afraid to speak more, afraid to move, lest this wonderful spell of seemingly painless tranquillity should lose its serenity; lest her consciousness of his presence, her surroundings, of all that pertained to her, should lapse. He had longed passionately, deeming it impossible, for such a moment as this, that he might ask her to forgive him his sins of unworthy sonship. His opportunity was here now; his opportunity was eternally beyond him. To disturb her tranquil hour, perhaps by doing so to quicken her consciousness to the existence of the chaos of pain now mysteriously stilled, would be to add to his score his greatest sin against her; greatest because this would be done in realisation of its cruelty.

He suffered the mute moments to advance and recede, a torturing cotillion of dreads and fears, making a dance of his indecision. The memory of a hundred little things wherein he had failed her trust and faith rose at him—it was his chance for peace in remembering her when she had gone. She was so restful-seeming; she should have died a month ago; how could he, with a jarring thrust of actual thought, fling her to that pain mysteriously stilled for the moment? Better to bear his punishment; he had deserved it with a thousand slights. Coward that he was to flinch from reparation.

"Mother!" he said poignantly. He could be allowed to say that with impunity; it meant nothing but a name—meant everything but a name.

"Yes?" she said.

He remained arrested in a movement to change his position, his elbows away from a resting-place, his hands turned forward gestureless. He realised that, having said so much, he had said so little that he must continue. The cavalcade of memories of his sins and the cavalcade of memories of pain she had born and which he must not cause her to resuffer, swiftly rode down upon his mind as if each side of his brain were thinking separately,

opposedly. Coward that he was not to bear his punishment ! Coward that he was not to give her the justice—rather than mercy—of his abasement.

“ Yes, Arnold ? ” she repeated.

He sank his arms to an easier position and let his hands clasp over his knees. He could escape continuing his speech ; he could say, “ I just wanted to say ‘ Mother,’ mother, that was all,” and she would be happy in knowing him affectionate. But he leaned towards her, kissed her as her son.

“ I am afraid I have not always been a good son, mother,” he said. “ I’ve grumbled a lot when you’ve been doing your best for me all the time. I remember one morning when I got up too early, before you called me. I could not find you, and went out to look for you. It was before the shops were open, and you had been going round to those early morning coffee-houses in Brabazon Street to buy milk for my cup of tea to bring up to me. They don’t sell milk over the counter, but you got it from one farther on and was coming back. There was nobody about so early. It was a quarter to five by the New Inn’s clock. The sky was only just getting grey, and the streets were grey ; thin wetness was in the air. You had not anything on your head—and I grumbled at you. I said the coffee-house people would think I made a drudge of you. I think I swore ; you only said as you’d done it ‘ cause I couldn’t go out on a morning like that without something to warm me. It was not for your own tea—I never left any. I——”

“ You needn’t worry over anything like that, Arnie,” said his mother. “ If you’ve grumbled at me at times, I expect I’ve deserved it. You must not worry over things like that.”

The glory of mother-love which forgives even while it is being sinned against shone for Arnold to see for a moment the fringe of its radiance even before he felt the lift of her forgiveness ; before he realised that he had not abused the tranquil hour.

“ Is that Mary ? ” asked his mother.

Arnold had not noticed that Mary had entered.

"Yes," said Mary, putting down her packages, and plucking off her gloves as she came round the table.

"Would you like something to drink, mother?"

"Please, Mary." She sipped from the glass which Mary held, and turned to her quiet sleep again. There was nothing to be done. Mary and Arnold sat beside the bed, loving to be near her in that peaceful hour which followed.

The dull, heavy cloak of inertia swaddled Arnold's senses again after its blanket folds had been temporarily thrown back. He had few thoughts as he sat and waited; unless such waiting is one long thought. He thought it strange, without caring why, that he did not feel some quickening of emotion during this pause in the ante-chamber with one who waited an audience with Death.

Into his negative state of mind passed the thought that Mary might break down in the last moments of her long sacrifice. He turned his glance to her and found that she was looking at him. Possibly that had thrown the thought into his heavy mind.

"I was only thinking," he said to her, "that you must be beginning to feel the strain is too much for you."

"I shall go on till everything is all over and then I shall give way. So long as I have plenty to do I can go on. After to-night there will be a great deal to do till after the funeral. Then I shall feel. The clock has stopped; set it going. The doctor will want to know the time for the certificate. I had been forgetting; we shall want hot water in the kettles." She rose, and Arnold went and looked at her wrist-watch, which was fastened round a candlestick in another room. He wound the clock and set the pendulum in motion. The ticking was uneven; he packed one of the bottom corners of the clock with a crushed matchbox, making the sounds evenly paced. Everything he did he did with the mechanical stroke of thought and detachment of a man chopping wood.

He tried to press upon himself the emotional stress of this time of waiting, telling himself that it was not reverent to be dispassionate. He tried to stir up feeling by thinking of his mother's wonderful will, which in this hour was being bent—impossible as it was for fate to break it—and when bent would soon be tossed away—a lost, but not a spent, force.

He looked at her face, marvelling that any form so tender could be the cover to anything so strong. "Please God," he murmured in prayerlessness, "her will, so magnificent, shall not be lost in the void we do not understand, but shall be given to me; an inheritance, an heirloom."

His mother made a slight murmur, and Mary moistened the feeble lips. Arnold bent forward, but the words were lost, although their sound was contentment.

"Do not disturb her," said Mary. "It is cruel."

A little while, and there was a heavier purring in his mother's breathing; and she, Ann Brooke, heroine, died.

Mary and Arnold had risen. There was silence in the home; real silence, despite the sounds of a house. That is real silence when we cannot hear the sound we listen for. It lasted but a moment; but it was one of those moments which withhold their exit, as when a man in the dark, seeking to close a door noiselessly, closes the last inch of gap so carefully that it seems that the post retreats before the latch and that the latch and post will never meet. That moment was longer than had been the hour of waiting. Man made seconds to fit the markings on a dial: God made them to fit the measure of His purpose.

"Isn't she very lovely?" said Mary.

Arnold nodded. "When Death comes so quietly as this," said Arnold, "there is nothing to fear in it. I hope I die like this."

"Will you go for the woman while I fetch the things from upstairs?" said Mary. "I have everything ready. And jot the time down on something—the clock has stopped."

"I know. I heard it stop as I stood up. I did not know I did, but I did. I will look at the watch to be sure." He took a stub of pencil from his pocket and went into the other room. And still the coma of his senses allowed him no emotion of the happening; no joy that his mother would not suffer further; no grief for all there was for grief.

"It cannot be that I do not—did not love my mother," he said to himself. "I know I did. It is because there are things for me to do, and in a way they are things for her. There will be times in the next few days when I shall have nothing to do. I would like to feel that then I shall give her my tears. She can see into my heart now, and she knows that my silence of senses is not the strong man masking his feelings; that this lethargy is not on me because I am frozen with grief; she knows that I am just dead to any sorrow: that—I—am—indifferent. It is horrible to be indifferent at such a time, I know, but I cannot feel horror." He released the blind cord and lowered the venetian laths, heeding that they should not rush down.

Empty hours there were in the next few days; yet they were quite empty for him; sorrowless. When for the last time he looked at her face, he knew nothing save that she was beautiful, with winter beauty. He knelt to kiss her; knowing that he must not kiss her cheek, lest the pressure of his lips should leave a mark, he laid his lips among the looping of her hair, and even then was as dead to grief as she.

Mary was busy in those few days. She set the house in speckless order. She ran together a simple black frock. The frock made her look slim and tiny; so Arnold thought on the morning of the funeral when she first wore it.

A rain-sweet night had led in a morning fresh and faintly bright. The minister from the church which Mary attended was to hold a short service in the room of Arnold's house where his mother lay, instead of, as usual, in the cemetery chapel.

The room lost all its homeliness for the sad occasion. The men who were to be bearers and the few sympathisers who were in attendance seemed to make the room encompassingly small. The undertaker was like an alert commercial traveller. The minister was young, which cheered Arnold a little, for he had dread of rites and the matured rumbling of vowel sounds in the throats of elderly ministers which turned even a weather remark to a psalm from the pulpit.

Arnold still felt the thrall of his callousness. He was nervously wishful for the service to commence and end, and that was all. In the circle round the bier he chose to stand where he deemed he would be a steadying influence should one of the younger women be inclined to be hysterical. He stood between Mary and the girl who was to be in charge of the house and prepare a meal while the coaches were absent. Arnold did not approve of women being present on such occasions ; he considered that they had no control over their emotions, and of all occasions when a "scene" should not destroy dignity in an assembly, such an occasion as this was to be most carefully guarded from it.

He felt the concentrated essence of woe spreading from one to another. It was this spreading and collecting of other minds' material which would wave upon the emotions and cause demonstrativeness rather than actual, personal feelings. He thought that if he were not woven about in this unemotionalism, that he himself might be moved by the combined press of other's feelings.

The minister began to pray. Arnold closed his eyes and relaxed his muscles. He let his hands hang each within the other, in the open bend of his fingers. He allowed himself to drift helmlessly in the wake of another's prayer.

The prayer began as one of thankfulness for the life his mother had lived. It turned to beseech for comfort for him who had rested in her bosom, who had played round her knee, for whom she had made a mother's sacrifices——

Arnold felt suddenly as if he wanted to weep his heart away, and in that moment he realised that he was at the mercy of his emotions. He knew what he had done ; that when he relaxed his limbs and brain and gave himself up to the prayer, he had not been picked up by the prayer, the prayer had nothing to do with this great terror of tears which had come upon him ; he had been picked up by that grief which had been waiting, waiting, waiting for him to cease questioning where it was so that he should not grasp and bridle it as it rose upon him. It had found its moment. He had put off from himself all speculation, and bowed in weakness among the curtains of another's prayer, and now on every side sorrow pressed upon him and his heart seemed burst with griefs.

He heard a deeper fervour added to the prayer, as if his distress had given greater encouragement to the plea, but the words were lost to him in the cymbal-clash of his emotions.

He tried to clutch at his panic. It must be now, now, or he would be submerged. It was not to be stemmed ; it was a force—that which no man could control. He forced downward at it and it rose, rose steadily, refusing to be baffled.

It spread about his heart ; it swayed his body, and his struggling wrote out the drama of the struggle on his memory, ever and ever to be enacted when he bowed his head in after days. He held his hands to his side, gripping the pouch of flesh in his palms. He straightened his body, as if to withstand a wrestler's hold, but bent his head so low that no one could see. As yet no one knew. He must crush it quickly before they knew—quickly—and bind it until he returned to the house and had locked himself within a room.

A great sob broke from him. He had lost ; he had forgotten his manhood. He felt the agony of painless tears. O God ! if he could only be alone ! *He was alone !*

It was stronger than he ; it flooded his mind ; and through the welter of grief came the knowledge that it

was not all grief ; accusation and remorse cried in his heart.

“ Hypocrite. Hypocrite. They think you are but a little child lost from his mother. You are, you are ; but you are more ; you are a weak, vainglorious coward who is left without anyone to shelter you. Hypocrite, it is not only for your loss you weep. Your grief is matched by knowledge of all the slights and words that you have cast at her. Think of them ! Think of them ! Think of them ! Forgiven ? What is that ! Your mother always forgave you as you spoke the things. She told you at the end that she forgave you. What of that ? You said the things, you said them. Remorse ? What of that ! Break your little paltry heart ; it cannot take away the fact that you bruised her love over and over and over again. The past is dead, but it lived once ! Remorse and forgiveness can draw out the pointed weapon ; time can heal the wound ; but nothing prevented the pain at the moment when you struck—— And she is dead.”

Chapter VIII

JOHN ROCKBY was annoyed.

He stood in his new studio, which was at the top of a modern brick and terra-cotta building in Council Square, one of the hearts of Birmingham. In the centre of the city there were several of these frog-shaped tablelands, with wide or narrow thoroughfares elbowing from them, but they were all within a harlot's promenade each of the others.

Council House Square was the main one. Possibly it was the cornice and pediment which made the Council House so like a cheap sideboard. More statues had been put into this square than any of the others. One or two of the baggy trousered figures stood by themselves, but in most cases they were collected on islands, giving the effect of cruets with some of the sauce bottles taken out for use and left in odd places among the lamps on the tableland. The statues in themselves were diverting in the extreme. Possibly the trio on the middle oval were the quaintest. The Queen with her orb seemed modelled from a cook about to put a plum pudding in the boiler ; the statesman in underwear—tight clothing and a slipping dressing-gown, who advanced a toe over the edge of his pedestal, looked as if he were testing if the water in the swimming bath was cold ; the orator, who was shown as emphasising a declamation by resting the fingers of one hand in the palm of the other, appeared to be tossing for half-pennies. There had been four figures on this island, but the bishop, whose two fingers were raised in blessing, had been stated in the local Press to be calling for two bitters, and the statue had been placed in a more secluded place rather than waste the stone. That so

great a city as Birmingstow had done this showed that she was not entirely ignorant of, but sensitive about, her squint. And yet she let Fountain Memorial, a big and comic collection of sculptors, remain not more than the rays of an arc-lamp away.

John Rockby, who was one of the city's favoured artists, chose this as the vantage-ground for his profession when he ceased to be a master at the School of Art. Seeing that a number of his sitters were business men, or active on the city council, he probably had chosen a good spot and was a sound business man.

But this morning he did not think he was a good business man ; he thought he had been a fool. He had had three orders cancelled. His clients had not postponed their sittings ; they had cancelled their orders. One was going abroad ; another thought he had made a mistake, that he was too old to turn to such vanity as sitting for a picture ; the third, Mr. Frost, had given no reason. This had been a week before, and, although John Rockby was busy, the loss rankled. He could find no reason for the sudden caprice of the three. He doubted if it was caprice. At odd moments he looked down into the Square and bit his nails, and pondered fretfully.

Mr. Frost's pianoforte warehouses were on the opposite side of the Square, where Parraline Street mouthed into it. John Rockby looked often at the door of the showrooms. Sard Eglantine Sard used a room on the premises for his music instruction. The thought persisted in the artist's mind that possibly Mr. Sard had influenced Mr. Frost's decision to withdraw his order. Mr. Sard had expressed facile scorn of Arnold Brooke to Rockby, intimating that the artist had not been acting strictly within conventions of class etiquette when he introduced a person of the labouring community to a gentleman and an artist.

John Rockby was John Rockby. He said that he had not thought till then that Mr. Sard was deceived by Brooke's pretensions ; that he thought he had made the jest pointed when at the introduction he had said

the youth got his living at painting ; that Brooke was so palpably what he was that it did not occur to him for a moment that anyone could be mistaken. He pleaded that if he was to blame at all it was because he was so sure in his mind that the undesirable acquaintance was an "impossible person" that he thought the fact was patent to everyone.

As John Rockby looked at Mr. Frost's doorway he saw Bennetta Sard leave the step. She walked among the people who spilled in and out of the Square. It occurred to him that she might be coming to visit him. But why?

He chose to turn from the portrait of Alderman Spalding on which he was painting the high lights of a boot and to fill its place on the easel with a panel of Miss Helen Vawn. The change was swift. An easy chair was placed where anyone who sat upon it would observe the picture of the young lady ; a padded corset bust was lifted to a box ; about the padded satin throat and breast were the neck jewels of Miss Vawn. It was these which the artist turned to depicting with the palette and brushes wet from the alderman's boots.

He was humming a sea-rover's song when the knock fell on the studio door. "Come in," he called in his manly voice, and took up the song again. The door was hidden by the canvas.

So follow me where glory lies,
Good men, true and fine.
For he who quails when danger hails
Can ne'er be mate of mine.

"Is it you with the mouldings, Jaykins?"

The door clicked to its hold. "No, Mr. Rockby."

He stepped round the easel. "Miss Sard!" he said. "This is a pleasure. Won't you sit down?" He directed her to the easy chair. "You are one of us, aren't you? I mean you are an artist yourself?"

"I played at it once," she said, as she turned to the chair.

"Then you will not mind if, while we talk, I continue. Commissions, it's good to have them; the more the merrier; pupils, it's good to have them; the more the merrier; but they keep me in constant see-saw, wondering which I shall have to refuse, fresh commissions or new pupils, and in the end I go on taking more of both and cutting out my simple pleasures. You can't do too much for art. Then I'm a cautious man. I always think if I tell myself I'm too busy to take on Miss So-and-so's portrait just now, I might be restraining my hand from the very picture which would first get me hung in the Academy; if, on the other hand, I tell myself that I ought not to have another pupil, I might be turning away the very one that art wants—one of the real ones."

He flung a glance to see if she was a prospective client or a pupil. Her head was bent. She was tending a green-backed bunch of shiny violets which had been held by the buckle of her furs and which had dropped to her lap as she unclasped the fastening and unsheathed her shoulders from the soft envelopment.

"You see," he proclaimed, holding his palette as a tray and his brush as a wand, "the only thing is to take both and be grateful. Do you like this of Miss Vawn? I hope on for a particular type, neither brunette nor blonde, and apple blossom for a background."

"I am afraid I am rather selfish, Mr. Rockby. I did not come about pictures; I came about my own affairs."

John Rockby laid his palette on the corner of a table. "Won't you pull your chair nearer the fire?" he said.

He eased forward with his knee a chair for himself, but he did not sit down. He threw off his overall and hung it on the shelf of the easel, and took a stand which emphasised his bigness. He did not know that Bennetta Sard was not one of the women who are impressed by bulk—bulk alone.

"Not to waste your time too much," she said, "I will come straight to the matter. I want to know about Mr. Brooke."

"I don't know a great deal about him," said Rockby.

"But you can tell me this much—and it is all I want to know—is he an artist in addition to being a workman? Does he do anything—however slight—as an artist, or is he just an extravagant working man who uses a smattering of jargon from the schools of art to obtain entrance into circles where artists really do things? I want to know. I want to know because I can condone his wish to be among better society than his work provides him with; I could even take it as a compliment to myself that he jumped upon a different plane from his own merely because I happen to be on it. But I cannot forgive him deceiving me into thinking that he was an artist, that art was the only thing which counted with him. Is he in any way an artist? Friends are laughing at my father because of his 'spare-time gentleman.' Is Arnold Brooke also a spare-time artist?"

John Rockby shrugged. He thought, "How very like a woman. She does not mind the man making a fool of others, but she objects to him making a fool of her." Aloud, he said, "If he is an artist, I don't know anything about it. I should say that he never has, never could paint a picture. He was only one of the 'also rans' at the school. It is unlikely that he should afterwards do anything that was worth the paint and canvas he used on it. Why should he? He does not get the chance. I'm sorry for him, of course, in a way, but when anyone sets up to be anything in our line you can always call for the obvious proof or tell him to get out."

His eyes swept to and fro in a semicircular glance, meeting her glance at the middle of the arc. He saw that she was extremely disturbed, and pale with a fluttering pallor. He cursed Arnold for involving him in any way with the annoyances of these influential

people. He surmised that Arnold had been making love to Miss Sard, using as a base her proneness to encourage a struggling artist to reach to ideals.

"Won't you think again, Mr. Rockby? Perhaps I'm foolish, and want to be deceived in spite of myself. I'm hoping even now, that if he never has done anything in that way, that he intended to, and that, given a chance, he could accomplish something worthy." She leaned forward in the chair and her furs slipped smoothly down. "Tell me all that you know of him, Mr. Rockby. I want to judge for myself if I'm still making a mistake or how big a mistake I've made. I don't know anyone else to go to. You seem to be the only person who knows him outside the people he has met through my father."

"I can't help you much. I only know he is a house-painter and seems to be out of work a great deal at times. I shouldn't have known that only he told me so a few minutes before I introduced him to your father. I hadn't seen him for two or three years, so asked him what he was doing."

"I knew he was that," said Bennetta, shaking her wrist to dismiss the question. "You see, years ago he came with some men who were at work on the rooms at home. He brought some things on a handcart, and I saw him leaving the house with it. I didn't say anything to him. I've seen him working on buildings about town when he hasn't seen me. I read the name of the people he was with on the steps and ladders because he changed from those that worked at home, and I used to look out for the name on the ladders. I liked to see him working. I don't mind that. He has never mentioned that work to me, but he *has* said he was an artist. I want to know, I want to know if he was an artist. He told me about your studio once or twice, and I thought he might have shown you some of his work—that you could tell me if he is a charlatan." She tried to hold his glance.

"When he talked about being in my studio, he meant when he was a little urchin with a damp nose who used

to fetch and carry for me. But he became impertinent about coming to the School of Art, and I wouldn't allow it. You yourself would know how he got on there ; you were in the same classes. I suspect he followed you ; that he only went at all because you did. Mind you, I don't know anything about it. I never saw any of his work. It's very fine of you to show any interest in him. But, all said and done, why should you ? He isn't worth it. Anyway, you are touching pitch. And what does it matter ? He's had his little fling ; caused a great deal of annoyance to people who had been kind to him ; and is now probably enjoying the joke with the men he works with. I suppose you know the kind they are ? You can take it from me that he was only laughing up his sleeve at your father all the time."

"I can't think that, Mr. Rockby." She rose, and roused a brightness in the dullness which was shadowing her eyes. "I mustn't hinder you longer. If it had not been a matter of importance to me I would not have come. My father will not let me mention Mr. Brooke to him. But I wanted to know if I could do any good. You are a man of ideals, Mr. Rockby, or you would not be in the position you are, so you will understand my wish to do the most good that I may in the world, especially for art. I could have helped Mr. Brooke if he had the germ ; I can help Mr. de Valing ; but I could not help both. They detest each other. Mr. de Valing asked me last night to marry him. He says that his art needs me. I tell you this as an understanding artist. He says that I keep his lyre tuned. I asked for a day to think it over."

"I understand," said John Rockby. "But I think that you would have wasted your generosity on young Brooke."

"Thank you," said Bennetta tiredly. "Everything is very difficult for people when they try to do what is best." She extended her hand.

"You will accept Mr. de Valing ?" asked Rockby.

She looked up as if annoyed, and then, as if admitting

that the question was natural, she said, "Yes. Good-bye."

"Happiness all round," he said, and opened the door. "Good morning."

He returned to the window. His foot slipped. He kicked away the bunch of violets upon which he had trodden. He saw Bennetta crossing the square of stupid statues. "Clay," he said, with a rare lapse from mundane thoughts.

He put on his overall, and dropped spots of oil about the palette where the body colour was no longer moist. He painted in the jewels meticulously, his nervousness of touch due to an endeavour to concentrate while he was irritated. "Damn it all," he said. "I'm not preparing a jewellers' catalogue." And he flaked white on the round of a pearl. Nevertheless, he immediately took a pencil in grey and too carefully defined the high light. He pranked in the claw of the setting. "I'll cut out this showing off to posterity with the rest of the madams I do, or charge them extra for jewellery. That will stop them hiring a mile or two of ornaments. Brooke, the young swine, why couldn't he get about without getting me into this mess? Lord knows where Sard will stop if he's got his knife into me. And there's another cupful of emeralds has to be hung in her ears yet. I'll tell her they drag the ear out of shape. Why can't—— Oh, *come in!*" He leaned his head round the canvas as a knock fell on the door.

Arnold Brooke came in. John Rockby lowered his jaw and ran the underneath of his tongue to and fro along the front of his lip. He rubbed the moisture away with his knuckle.

"Shall I come in?" asked Arnold.

"In, aren't you?" asked Rockby.

"Yes, but I thought you might be busy."

"I am." Suddenly John Rockby remembered he had a news item of interest for his visitor. "Come in and don't let that draught blow any longer."

Arnold came into the studio and stood awkwardly. He stared hard at the artist, to see if he were jocular or

whether he was one with the world which scorned him. Rockby swept his glance round in search of a paint rag, and his glance passed into and across Arnold's in passing. It could scarcely be said that they looked at one another.

"Anything particular?" asked Rockby, removing a dropping of paint from his toecap.

"No. I'm leaving Birmingstow. I'm going to London, and I had a feeling that I'd like to call and see you before I went. I sort of felt I'd like somebody to wish me 'Good luck.' I'm going to-morrow."

"You've been a bit of a high-flyer lately, haven't you? Reaction from Rudyard Street?"

"I don't think I've been more ambitious than encouragement warranted."

"What are you going to London for? Got work there?"

"No. But, then, I haven't any here either. It can't be worse there, and another thing; I thought I might do something with my art there. Mr. Sard, for instance, wouldn't feel that I'd exploited his kindness if I achieved something there. I couldn't do it here. You know that people here always have to look inside the ring for the hallmark before they know it's gold. They like their artists ready made."

"Eh!" said John Rockby.

"Well, you know what Birmingstow is for an artist before he has made his name," said Arnold. He was supremely uncomfortable, although he was seated in an easy chair in the company of one of the few men he was fond of.

"What's the matter with Birmingstow?" asked the artist, straddling his legs with his back to the fire, his hands behind his back, his overall bunched through his bent arms and skirting before him. He asked it antagonistically, but his glance around the studio was complacent. "Besides, there are artists and artists. What odds here or London. You haven't started to take art seriously, have you?"

"I never left off."

"What do you do?" asked Rockby sceptically.

"Landscape mainly; townscapes, if you like to put it like that," said Arnold, fretting, and sore with weariness at charity withheld.

"Really? You aren't coming it with me as well, are you? Just keeping up the pose?"

Arnold looked bewildered. "Are you joking with me just to buck me up a bit?"

He looked at Rockby, solid of build, towerlike of proportions; the type of man whom a man who is not an athlete thinks fine, lusty, and sinewed for prowess. In the empty shell of Arnold's loneliness was the muted murmur of kindnesses done him in childhood by the man smiling before him. The sound of the sea-shell is sad because it is the sound of the sea receding.

Arnold had kept the fallacies of childhood longer than most men, owing to his isolation. Until lately they had still clustered round his belief in the innate nobility of human nature, as the feathers of a time-teller cluster prim around the dandelion stem—until lately: the time-teller had been bent into the wind, and most of the fairy minutes blown away; a few remained, but it needed only a breath, a breath of laughter, to leave it naked. Arnold could not believe that John Rockby was not a good man and true.

John Rockby looked searchingly at Arnold. He saw that he was pale, and his cheeks a little recessed. He attributed it to dissipation. He considered him from foot to head—patent leather shoes with silk laces, black silk hose, a lounge suit of navy blue, a bat's-wing bow, an overcoat of thick grey fleece, well tailored with a little display, forgivable in a very young man. He appeared to be a man of fashion according to the Birmingstow pattern. John Rockby knew that he was also minted in Rudyard Street, where the moulds were made of most evils. Rudyard Street possibly knew much good, but certainly it had all knowledge of craftiness. He knew also that Arnold had masqueraded in an intellectual circle of local society whose selectiveness was painful to those above

and below it. As he met Arnold's glance he felt that shrewdness was apparent in it. John Rockby was John Rockby; he could not believe that Arnold was naïve and unsophisticated. "He will get somewhere some day with that nerve of his," he thought, "if it is only into jail."

"I didn't know you did anything beyond the school, and that only to be near Sard's girl," John Rockby said, leading Arnold on to betray himself irrevocably.

"But I thought from the way you spoke that you seemed ready to back me up when you introduced me to Mr. Sard and those others; that you knew I was all out for art, that I have stuck it for years and years. Weren't you really trying to do me a good turn because I had not had much success and it comes so easily to you?"

"Think it comes to me easy, do you?" asked Rockby, with a broadening of his cheeks. "And you have not had much? Had any? Exhibited anything?"

Arnold had sunk back from the critical to his pupil attitude towards John Rockby. He turned to him, eager for a little approbation, craving the mercy of a little understanding, sick for a little humanity, an orphan of encouragement and sympathy—an artist fallen foul of Birmingstow.

"Yes," he said. "Nothing any good, though. I signed them A. Brook with the 'e' dropped. They wouldn't look at any of my serious canvases, and I wanted to test my work. I've been at it now, you must remember, for close on six years; and if you never get any return from art, sooner or later you drop it; unless you are a fanatic. I wanted to see if I was absolutely hopeless—see if I could shoot a bottle off a string before I aimed at a buck. So I did some of those pictures that look as if they have had a tin of condensed milk poured over them. You know—the kind of thing that G. Brompton is trying to start a Midland School of Landscape painting with—the ice-cream school. I don't think you've done any, but you know how they are done. You squeeze a thick coat of Chinese white all

over the canvas first, and while it is still wet you paint on top of it, choosing a suitable subject, of course—‘Moonrise on the Loch’; ‘Seashore in Mist’; ‘Soft Twilight.’ If you put a seagull or any object in, and you fancy it in another position, you just glide it over the surface—the whole patch moves on the wet ground. And if you want to leave off till the next day, you scrape off the white you have not touched and squeeze more white up to the ridge to-morrow. Not that you’d be likely to want to leave off; you can do as many as you need in an afternoon. I didn’t sign very legibly.”

“No?” murmured Rockby tamely.

“No. If you’ve noticed, Brompton himself signs with a lozenge. I think he has a sense of humour; must have, or he would not try to start a school.”

“Mm,” said Rockby. “I know the man you mean; but you don’t call that art? There is no objection to any means being employed to get a good effect, but the effect is not good.”

“That’s so, but——” began Arnold.

Rockby interrupted him. “We won’t discuss it. I don’t care to.”

Arnold felt snubbed. He asked himself if John Rockby also meditated disapproving of him and wished to cut him, but he checked the thought as unworthy of him. Even if John Rockby was not such a fine fellow, he could not charge Arnold with deceiving him as to his station, since he had always been aware of it.

“That’s the only time I’ve done that kind of stuff. I go all out for what I hold is best. That was one of the reasons why I came to see you before I went away. I wanted to know if you’d mind storing one or two of my pictures till I’m settled.”

“I’d like to,” said John Rockby, “but you see how I am limited for room space. This place is pretty expensive, and I have to make the most of it. And now I’m married, and in my own house, it does not do to have canvases kicking all over the place.”

“I’m sorry,” said Arnold hastily. “You must

forgive me. I'm afraid I haven't any sense of perspective. I'm like that. I don't think of the trouble I put people to until it's pointed out to me, and then I'm sorry enough. I must be a bit of a cad to think of asking you in the first place."

"That's all right," said Rockby, graciousness in his voice for the first time since the interview opened.

Arnold rose. "Well, good-bye," he said. "You have always been decent to me. It's good of you to see me now while you are busy, but you are the only one I am saying good-bye to. By the way, if you see Miss Sard, tell her by accident that I've left Birmingstow, will you?"

"Certainly I will. Did you know she was engaged?"

"E—r?"

"She's engaged to be married."

"Who to?"

"Mr. de Valing."

"Who told you?"

"She did."

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"Oh, well—good-bye."

"Good-bye, and the very best of luck." There was a flinch in their handshake, and Arnold could not tell from whom it came, himself or John Rockby.

Arnold preferred to walk down rather than avail himself of the lift. As he reached the first landing he heard a door above open.

John Rockby called, "I say, old boy."

Arnold turned and trod up the stairs a few steps. "Yes!" he cried.

Rockby leaned round the handrail as he said, "If you've got any canvases that you are not taking away, or any that will paint over, I can always do with some, you know."

"Before I go," said Arnold, "I'm going to destroy them all. Then I shall be quite alone."

The door above closed.

"I'm a bit of a boor," thought Arnold. "But still,

I'm too sick of everything to be civil all the time. Shall I walk or go on the tram? Walk. Oh, no, let me get home." He overlaid a laugh with gruffness. "*Home!*"

When he reached the house in Chapel Grove he said again "Home," but he said it thickly and half under his breath. The front room was bare. He had cleaned it after the sale of the furniture, and it seemed clean and naked as a skull—dead beyond death. A sheet of light came through a slot of the Venetian blind and reached to the wall beyond like the shining ceiling of a tent.

His steps struck on the boards as if the heels of his shoes were iron blocks. He stepped on his toe-points. He wondered if he was alone in the house, although he knew that he was. The gloom occasioned by the lowered laths made it a house in mourning. He stepped back to the window, and, plucking the cord, rattled up the blind.

The light was fading for evening, but it was strong enough to make grey the room; to show the shapes on the floor and walls where furniture had stood and pictures hung—shapes; the ghosts of household gods.

Every sound he made was mimicked by an echo. He looked at the faded outlines on the walls, seeing, not them, but the familiar things which had made them. Memory quested emotion through his bosom. He answered the plaint of the barren spaces on the walls. "I had to sell them. I couldn't go on without money or paying Mary back. I don't know how I shall go on even as it is." He caught himself looking to the mirror which no longer stood on the chimneypiece. He started as the room changed suddenly with a spreading of golden screens; the lamplighter had lit the lamp at the opening of the Grove. As if he pushed his way past ghosts he reached the door into the kitchen.

His bags were packed and lay in the middle of the kitchen floor. They were sufficient to take away the sense of utter emptiness, and made a focus for his eyes. He went up the stairs. The knocking of his footsteps was given back from every room. On the little landing

he paused, his hand upon the knob of the room he called his workroom, thinking of what he was about to do.

He was glad it was dark, for he would not see the pictures. A week before he had placed them so that as he opened the door they would be facing him, welcoming him whenever he came in. And if it was light and that welcome was there for him, as it always had been, he believed that his spirit would weaken and he would spare.

He opened the door. The blackness of the staircase had deceived him ; it was not dark in the room. They were all there, eager with welcome ; telling him they had been looking for his coming, wanting him, and lonely without their lover, storing their beauty for him——

“ Oh, God,” he said slowly, and stepped back upon the stairs and pulled the door shut.

He sat upon the top stair, his elbow on his knees, his head bowed between his hands. He remained, slightly swaying, until it must have been dark within the room ; until long after it was dark in the room.

Arnold rose, stiffly and wearily. He would have to perform the act in cold blood ; he had no spirit for it. He felt no bitterness, no self-pity, only the emptiness of despair and life's utter futility.

He stood close to the door, and sawed his hand up and down with the knob in the cleft of his fingers the while he asked himself for the many hundredth time if it was necessary for him to destroy his work. What else could he do with them ? He could not take them with him. No one wanted them : no one, that was, who would cherish them. He dared not take from his little money the payment for storage, or, if he did, and anything happened to him so that he never came back to retrieve them, what would be their probable fate ? He opened the door and pushed it back to the wall.

The window sticks cut an oblong of night-sky into panels. The moon was blond. Where it shone the

wall was bare ; there were no pictures on that side. Oh, he had no heart for the work. He felt that the knee of God was pressing too hard upon him. " What shall I do ? " he said, " What shall I do ? " as he stood in the middle of the room.

He jerked himself to swift alertness. At the side of him something had moved ; it was but his silhouette shadow cut by the moon in the bright oblongs of moon-shine on the bare wall. " What shall I do ? " he asked his shadow. It was tall where it was cast, much bigger than he was, the hair spread untidily.

Just for a moment his eyes bleared and caused him to see colour in his shadow, redness in the hair. Only for a moment did the shadow seem to have red hair, but his shadow had answered him in that moment.

He did not fumble as he took the pictures down ; he knew where each one was. He did not hurry ; not spare himself a mite of anguish ; it was the least he could do for them—destroy them gently. Those which were in frames he took first. He worked the nails out with his fingers and put the frames carefully by the door, that they might be of use to whoever came after him. He took the wedges from the backs of the canvases before he peeled off the paintings. Even then he laid them all flat in a pile, that not one should suffer before the others ; that they might die together.

He put the matches ready near the tiny firegrate, and, taking the strips of wood they had been stretched on, broke them smaller, arranged them behind the bars, and brought the paintings near, that he should not need to open his eyes and see them in the light of their own blaze. He felt about to be sure that not one was overlooked. There was not one.

He knelt before the fire grate and lit the wood and closed his eyes. When he felt the heat about him, and the brightness of the blaze shone through his eyelids, he picked up the paintings and pressed them into the firegrate together. He felt to know if he had neglected one. They all were burning.

“ O God,” he said, “ if, when I have died, I am to come back and live another life upon this earth, let me not again be made an artist. Or if I must be—if what I leave off with, I have to start again with—let me be born anywhere but in this city. O God, remember this moment when you make me again.”



PART III

BOLSOVER STREET

Chapter I

ARNOLD groped for his ideals among bright illusions and frustrating shadows, as a man who gathers apples by moonlight. His harvest was leaves. He could think of nothing but food and warmth, comfort and safety from privation; and again food, and again food.

The stomach has no ideals. The artist who is ravenous for victuals is no more an artist than the joint he covets. Let the reek of savoury stewing steak—hot, ugly meat—reach his nostrils then and he will admit, if to none except himself, that art is only art; but food is food. The pungent gusts from frying-pans played havoc with Arnold's ideals. He no longer desired above all things to paint a picture which would make men ask who had created so intense and rare a thing; he longed, with desire more desperate than art had ever drawn from him, for one or two days' work with the promise of more.

Throughout the days his fingers were so stiff from cold that he would have been unable to hold a brush had he had commissions.

He could not have been more incapable of serving art had Fate, instead of dooming him to slow starvation, decreed that his hands should be beaten out by a blacksmith's hammer such as was proudly displayed on the crest of Birmingham.

He was not quite starving; he had had a meal the day before. He was not quite destitute; he had a little money left. But the terror of what would happen in

the days when it was gone prevented him from spending it.

His greatest fear for when it would be gone was the dread of having no shelter, and being arrested for having no visible means of support. His ideas on that subject coupled to imprisonment were vague and alarmingly out of all proportion to what probably would have happened had his fears materialised. To guard against the catastrophe he had sewn twenty-two shillings in the lining of his waistcoat to produce if ever the necessity arose of proving that he was not without visible means of support.

His mother had been a wing spread between him and the knowledge of the ways of the unfortunate. He was childishy ignorant and apprehensive of many things pertaining to poverty; he thought that a work-house was only for those who were very old and infirm; he knew nothing of relieving officers; he doubted if the twenty-two shillings would be enough to prove what it was sewn up for.

Born and bred where he had been, where poverty was a profession, it might be deemed that his ignorance of poverty betokened simplicity. Possibly it did. He only knew that it seemed easier to pass an eating-house if he touched the cloth-covered shillings, telling himself that if he wished—if he were more of a coward or less of a coward, he was not quite sure which—that he *could* go up to the counter and order a sausage and mash for threepence, and that that knowledge made it easier to pass the shop. He believed then, and proved later, that it is easier to do without a meal if one has money in one's pocket than if one has none.

Although he had paid Mary back in full, and been incompetent at first in being sufficiently sparing to tide over the ill days which would come, he still had shillings besides those placed for when he would have to walk the streets at night as well as day. But it was the twenty-two which saved him most meals. He could feel their shape without obvious movement. When at middle day he came level with an eating-house—and to

him there seemed one to every lamp-post in Whitechapel, and hamlets of them in Limehouse—he always stopped; he had to stop; his stomach stopped, and the rest of his body, being attached (unfortunately, he thought), stopped with it. The windows were always rippled with condensing steam, through the trickles, as through the spaces between railings, shivering, he saw the diners eating and perspiring. They were men in work, packed so closely on the narrow seated benches that they were only enabled to eat by means of neckwork and wristplay. The cross-legged tables were so narrow that they had their plates of meat and vegetables, toad-in-the-hole, or stew before them packed round inconsequently with saucers of pudding and crocks of tea. Yet, although there was scarcely room for the mustard-pot, and the table looked like a cairn of hot meals built up from the floor, each man knew which plate of stewed fruit and custard or apple pastry was his, and took it when he emptied his plate. Plain dinners were sixpence, ninepence, and a shilling. At each window Arnold spread his fingers on his shillings, each one two meals, two, three, or more days of life—no, not really that; there was lodging to be considered; but he liked to think that food only was necessary to keep a man alive.

He knew all the eating-houses in Whitechapel and Limehouse, and what they had on certain days of the week, and which ones had a grating from the basement through which the cooking smell came steaming around one, permeating the clothes, saturating the body with the odour of food, and inflating the lungs—the lungs so near the stomach—as one breathed it.

When he had been near as many eating-houses as he could bear, he went to a baker's and bought a loaf, took it to a gateway or somewhere where people would not stare because he was unusually well dressed, and eat it. He would eat it all. He would eat so much that he felt full of bread, and if anyone had offered him a hot meat pie—a thing he continually longed for—he would have been compelled to refuse it.

Next he would go back to stand before the eating-house windows and laugh at them privately and touch the shillings.

He was as regular in this as were the workmen in their own meals, for he found it was useless applying for work in the dinner-hour, when the heads of firms were not at their businesses.

He was afraid he was becoming a familiar figure in Whitechapel and Limehouse. But he intended to leave it; there was nowhere else where he had the excuse of hope to ask for possible work. He had selected Limehouse in the hope of getting work on the dock as a labourer, or as anything; but the attempt had been futile.

He had told his landlord that he would not be wanting his lodgings for another week, but would be leaving on Monday. This was Sunday. Sunday was a detestable day to him; there was then nowhere for him to apply for work. However hopeless his applications were on other days of the week, they served to provide a motive for existence. Useless and exhausting as the treading of the treadmill of work seeking was, it was better, he knew, than the only alternative—leaning against an itching post at a street corner while his youth died, and his brain became as pumice stone, and the two most contemptible of all traits (self-pity and bitterness) spread their fungi on his dead ambitions. Often he looked at himself in his few inches of shaving mirror to see if he was becoming like the men who lounged at corners; if his features sagged and his eyes seemed painted with water-colour on segments of egg-shell. He listened to his voice to note if it had the ineffectual whine or pall-bearer's melancholy of theirs. He kept verve in his voice. His features did not sag, but they were settled and immobile, like—even in texture and colour—to a plaster cast taken after death; but his eyes lived.

It was Sunday; he had nowhere to go. It was as well, for he was unable to walk owing to water-blisters packed between his toes and the soreness of his soles.

He had spent all the morning tending to his feet, cutting the skin away, bathing them ; and, since he had no ointment, coating them with margarine and wrapping them up.

It was about three in the afternoon. He had managed to sleep away the annoyance of dinner-time. Of course, all day long it was dinner-time for him, but civilisation had established the time for a meal at middle day and he lived in the centre of obtrusive civilisation.

From the pile of clothes upon his bed he had risen stiff, and feeling the winter chill upon him. He had attended to his feet again, and now sat before the window. He was wearing such clothes as could be worn over others. His cap was pulled well down over his ears. Because he could not bear the compression of his boots, his feet were in his suit-case and were packed in by the one article which was given him as bed-linen—a piece of brown blanket. And his body was as ice ; he could scarcely believe that blood must be warm to flow.

He chose to sit at the window, not because the view was pleasing ; it was not (the iron platform and rail of the fire emergency-exit was level with the sill ; a builder's yard was beneath ; a blank wall, a road, and a batch of flat fronted houses was beyond) ; but because the view from the window was the same whether the room was beautifully appointed or what it was. The furniture consisted of an iron bedstead and straw mattress, a chair, and a table, on which was a broken basin and a water-jug, which by rights belonged to the next room, as that had three beds in it. The walls had at one time been distempered in green, blue, or grey. Arnold could not be sure which, although he had once rubbed them with a piece of wet paper to find out.

Arnold hated the room. He hated it in the light because of the meagreness of it ; he hated it in the dark because of the things he touched. Once he had tried to clean the floor with cold water and no brushes, but the dirt had worked up into a grey paste and sickened him.

The room was on the top floor of the hotel. Arnold

was not sure of the name of the hotel. It was written upon the window in Danish. It accommodated foreign sailors who came ashore while their ships were in the docks. There was no other regular lodger beside Arnold ; the same sailors seldom occupied the beds more than three nights. Arnold had grown accustomed to their varieties, and tolerant towards their abandon. He knew that ignoble festivals of lusts on shore were a reaction from many months of sex and sin privations at sea, and would be followed by many months more of enforced clean manliness. Also he believed that men of great sins seldom had little souls. After the first shock he was tolerant ; unto a man his conscience.

After his first night in the hotel with the Danish name he knew perfectly well that most of the sailors gave themselves up to debauchery while their boats were in the docks ; debauchery plain, debauchery complicated. If he stood on the iron landing of the emergency staircase and looked round an angle of the wall he could see, any night, three windows of a brothel. The inmates believed that the windows faced a blank wall, and so fixed no blinds. The seamen who were in the rooms when Arnold made the discovery were not drunk. He was surprised ; he had already seen so many of them helplessly, or quarrelsomely, or joyously drunk, but he concluded that some took their sins seriously, soberly, conserving all their appetites to one principal sin, making it a king sin. If anything was needed to dispel Arnold's first belief that the foreign sailors, since they looked to be fine men, were fine men, it was a full knowledge of how nights were spent in the next room to his own.

There was only pretence at privacy in the hotel. Double doors which had communicated between the two bedrooms had been replaced by two boards nailed upright. The room with three beds was light all night, owing to a street lamp which stood beneath the window and shot its rays on any man that moved above bed-level. He saw them fight, he saw them rob, he saw them smuggle women in, he saw them drunk to beastliness and grow lavish in unnaturalness, sinning against sin.

Arnold had moved his bed so that he would not see the other room at night. Not until after quite a week in Limehouse did he cease to feel horror ; life was life, but, thank God, it was not his life which he saw. To have the ideals of an artist allowed a man to be where others could not be without passing censor on his fellows, condoning or condemning. A priest may pass unsullied through a sin plague, but he cannot pass without upbraiding. A roué may pass through a welter of sin without abhorrence, but he cannot pass without approving by jealousy or envy. The artist who has nothing left but his ideals, even though he has lapsed from art, may pass unsullied, and yet without blaming or praising his fellows. Life is life ; his life can be his own life ; their life can be theirs. The ideals which were fashioned first to serve his art will wait upon his soul and serve it, because his art is his soul.

His ideals are as a fierce white flame which burns contaminating things before they can touch his artist spirit. His ideals tell him that he may not sin, because whatever stains him will show as stain upon his work. A man's face shows what manner of man he is ; an artist's work shows what manner of man the artist is. Arnold believed this. Also he believed that though art was dead for him, yet he could not defame his dead. So was he saved by the service of his ideal from being touched by the life around him.

The artist can paint in hell and not be scorched, even as he can walk in heaven and not applaud the choir. Arnold at that time believed in a heaven and a hell, but not in a hereafter.

All his life his ideals had served him ; but for that, born and bred among the lowest classes of society, he would have been of that class now, but he was not ; an artist belongs to no class of society.

Arnold sat on in complete physical misery, complete mental misery. He was soul-sick, heart weary, and had collapsed emotionally. He asked no questions of himself ; he just bared his patience in bowed recognition to the hearse-hour as it passed. He watched the town

twilight fall. In the clear daylight a gauze curtain was lowered down the sky, and behind it another and another, until the succession of curtains veiled the light sufficiently for day to be twilight. The gauze curtains continued slowly to fall behind the front ones of distance-grey, and the colours showed through—violet and smoky lapis-lazuli—until it was night in the town. The street lamps were struck into shine. The gauze curtains were lapped under and among each other in a fold, and then rolled up, revealing other curtains, but of these the gauze was silver, with apparently a rose-coloured one right at the back. The rose-medallion of the moon was seen in its dusty satin showcase. It gave all around the tint of cameo shell. Arnold sat on, barren to the impregnation of the magical beauty of God's twilight touch.

It was a night for artists; Arnold had forsworn his artistry. He grew restless under the witching spell which the loveliness soon laid on him. He knew that art was wooing him again; that she, who was so real to him, was calling; a little mockery was in her voice. "I have never lost a lover yet; not one; not one of them all; and I am as young and old as loveliness. I have never lost one lover yet. I did not lose the red-haired man; I will not lose you."

Arnold spoke aloud. "When I have eaten I shall laugh at you. It is being weak that puts these fancies into my head. I will go and get something to eat." But he remained perfectly still. "I will not begin to talk to myself like lonely men always do." Even that he said aloud.

He sat aching for his paint-box, that he might transmit to canvas the lighted windows, the fretted housetops, and a great height of sky. The yeast of art is not easily separated from the mixed temperament.

"I have never let one of my lovers go. Not one. Do you know what I do when they jilt me? Look at the moon while I tell you. I make them mad. I make them hanker for poisons; I make them go stand by deep water and fling up their arms with a cry, and fall;

some of them hang by a rope from a hook in the ceiling. There is no hook in this ceiling. Yes. I know that you have looked ; do not look again now, but keep your eyes upon the moon ; it helps me to make my lovers lightheaded. Not one of mine but has worshipped it. There is no hook, but—there is that iron platform. Perhaps I shall cover up the moon for you soon. If I do not, you can lean over—a little too far. Four stories is enough. There are bricks stacked beneath. You remember ; you looked. Open the window and look again to be sure they have not moved them. Go on to the platform and lean over and look.”

“ I shall laugh at you again when I have eaten,” said Arnold. “ I shall laugh at you now.” He laughed on the pitch of the whistle of a timid man who whistles in a dark lane to assure himself he is not afraid.

“ You are afraid to go on to the platform. You always were a coward. You have always known that you were a coward. You have always wanted not to be a coward. Go out on to the platform.”

A cold perspiration beaded Arnold's forehead. He closed his eyes and did not see the moon, but he had stared at it so fixedly that on the blackness of his shut lids the moon and its halo were depicted incandescently.

“ I am not a coward. I used to think that I was because I tremble before doing anything which I would rather not do. *But I always do it!* I used to think that although I had no physical fear and no moral fear, that I had fear of another kind because I trembled. Now I know that to tremble first and then perform, despite the shrinking, is the highest form of courage. If you want me to go on to the balcony you will have to try other taunts. *And then I shall not go.* Tell me that I should be better dead ; I know I should.” He rose and stumbled, with his feet muffled in the packing. He kicked the blanket away. “ Tell me,” he cried, “ that there is no one in the world who cares if I live or die ; I know there is not. Tell me that I am going to die of starvation like the red-haired man ; I know that

I am, and—I—will—not—go—out—on to the platform, and I will not drink poison like Chatterton, and I will not drown myself nor hang myself : *I will go out and eat !* ”

He paused ; he found that he was shouting. He stumbled about feeling for his boots. He spoke again, quietly but aloud. “ I know that in the end I shall go out on to the platform ; but first I shall go mad. I do not believe it is hunger makes me talk to myself. I wish that I believed in God—but how can I ? How can I ? ”

He stood upright and still. And then the most wonderful thing in his life happened to him. Peace that was almost blissfulness came upon him. He felt that he was not alone in the room. The feeling which had come to him in the room of his empty house on the night he burned his pictures came to him again, but differently stressed. He knew that he was not alone in the room—not alone in the world. Someone was near him now, although he was the only living person in the room.

He stood upright and still. Above his left shoulder he felt the lightness of a hand, as if it rested upon his own shape in space. It did not touch him, but was curved over the shoulder of a space which surrounded himself and was of himself.

He raised his left hand and laid it above the space of the hand which helped and comforted him. He felt nothing, but he knew the shape of it from the size and spread of his own fingers. It was not his mother's hand. It was not his father's hand as he remembered it. It was a man's hand, and bigger than the shape of his own. He waited in calm for a moment. The hand was drawn away, and his finger-tips sank and touched the nap upon the cloth of his coat.

“ That was strange,” he thought. “ I will not go out ; I will lie down and sleep.”

He did not ask himself why he had come to this decision ; he would not have known the answer had he asked. He stretched himself upon the bed, and felt to

pull his coats over him, but fell to slumber while his hand reached out.

The moon lifted higher into the sky. It went from view, but continued to pour light down the level of the window-pane and to spill it on the floor just under the window sill.

Cherished by sleep, Arnold woke with fresh energies. He did not recognise where he was at first. He looked at the narrow vat of molten silver sunk against the window wall. Someone was talking ; he realised that some seamen were being shown the next room for optional accommodation. He cursed them for breaking his sleep, and brought his stiff limbs together in an endeavour to garner warmth and encourage sleep to return.

"It's of no use," he thought, "I might as well get up. A walk will warm me if my blistered feet will let me trot around. Oh, you are getting on, my son ; you did not talk out loud that time. Mind you don't start it again. You go over to the 'Coffee Dog' at the corner of West India Dock Road, have a cup of tea, and sit by the stove until your blood's thoroughly warm, and then keep it circulating till it's bye-bye time again."

He put both feet to the ground ; they were sore but not painful. The seamen in the next room were sure to open his door in a minute. They usually came in to see who their neighbour was, more to assure themselves that their property was safe than to molest him.

He glanced through the openings of the boarded doorway into the next room to see what chance of a quiet night he had. There was a candle alight. One man was about to wash in a tin bowl. He was a massive man, with dog-breasts covered with black hair. The second man looked handsome in the candlelight ; he was taking the pieces of blanket from the two single beds and strewing them on the double bed. Evidently the men were going to sleep together for warmth. Since they made preparation they were anticipating having a night's rest.

"That's good," thought Arnold. "To-night I shall

not have any trouble trying to convince them that I'm not in their bed."

As Arnold put his boots on, the man who had washed entered the room. Apparently he could not see in the semi-darkness, but Arnold's eyes had grown accustomed to the lack of light. He watched in silence as the man moved from one wall to another, touching things tentatively—the bed, the table, the chair. Arnold was seated at the foot of the bed, and remained still. He knew that the man would touch him in a moment.

The man in the next room called, "Have you gone downstairs, mate?"

To Arnold's surprise, the man before him did not answer, but remained rigid, his hand outstretched, his head turned across his shoulder; as still as if he were a hidden photographer attempting to take a snapshot of a wild bird in its cover. The man in the next room extinguished the candle and went down the stairs, and the silence became hideous.

"There is someone in the room?" said the man quietly.

"So he is English," thought Arnold, but he spoke no word, and he breathed secretly.

"Who is in the room?" said the man.

The moon passed over the ridge of the roof and left no hint of its light in the room. He heard the stretching of the seaman's sleeve along his arm as he moved it towards him. He wondered where the man would touch him. He wondered what each of them would do at the touch. He knew from the man's tone when he had spoken that he was not certain that there was anyone in the room. It had been as much question as statement.

Arnold took advantage of the minute's respite before he was touched to form his intentions as to what he should not do when the hand came in contact with him. He relaxed his muscles that they might not be gathered to draw away. He prepared for the moment that he might not exclaim. He wondered if the man would attack him, or give a startled oath and withdraw.

"After all," he thought, "I must have been mistaken in thinking that the hand reached out nearer towards me, or it would have touched me before this." He had a wild impulse to advance towards the hand and meet it, but he checked the impulse. He wondered where it would touch him.

It touched his own hand, which rested on the bedrail.

It touched so lightly that it only brushed the fine hairs. It continued to move about the back of his hand with unbearable slowness. The fingers which touched his were warmer than his own; they were sensitive of touch, following a vein; it seemed almost as if there was a brain in the fingers, questing and questioning.

Arnold wondered what the man needed to know more than that he had found whom he sought.

The fingers touched Arnold's sleeve. The man gave a startled cry and sprang away. It puzzled Arnold that the man should feel no alarm in touching his hand but yet be startled when he touched his cuff.

"Why did you not answer when I spoke?" asked the man.

"Why should I? You've got no right in my room," said Arnold.

"Have you got a candle or a light or anything?"

"No," said Arnold. "What do you want it for?"

"I want to have a look at you. I am going to have a look at you."

"It is not one of my good-looking days," said Arnold.

"Perhaps it won't be if you are not on the straight," said the man, as he went to fetch the candle. He lit the candle on the landing and entered the room again. He regarded Arnold from the doorway for a second before he placed the candle on the table.

"Humph! You look all right," he said.

Arnold liked the look of the hirsute man. He looked so strong, so well fed, so full of energy that it was good to look at him.

"Sit down," said Arnold.

The man twirled a chair and sat astride it, his arms folded on the back.

"What did you come in here for?" asked Arnold.

"'Cause it's always best to know who you are next to in a strange crib."

"That's all right then. But that is not what I want to know so much as why, when you found out where I was in the dark and touched me, you took no notice, but as soon as you touched my clothing you jumped."

"Want to know that, do you?"

"I should rather," said Arnold.

"Believe in religion?" asked the man.

"No, the reverse."

"Believe in God?" asked the man.

"I should not like to think that there is not one; that's as far as I get," said Arnold.

"Believe in spirits?"

"No—yes. Wait a minute," said Arnold, "I don't know. I've had a funny thing happen to me."

"Have you? Well, I've had lots," said the man. "I thought you was a spirit. That's why. Spirits don't wear warm clothes. That's why again. When I come in here I felt that somebody was in the room but I could not see anybody. When I touched your hand it was limp, human-like, but not assertive; I've felt a spirit hand like that—often."

"Look here," said Arnold, "I'm not laughing at you. Tell me about it."

"Laughing at me? I should not think you was. What's the wherefore? If you'd had spells of the lonelies like a seaman gets in the night watches you would not be so ready to talk of laughing and such things, sonny. You are only a youngster, so you've had no trouble to speak of, but when you are sick to death of the daylight, and wish you'd never been hatched, you don't know what a comfort it is to know you are not alone, but that there's them you can't see a-weeping for you when you can't weep yourself, a-thinking for you when you can't think; and letting it into your mind what to do or what not to do. And I don't believe in religion, and I don't believe in spiritualism, and you'll catch your death of cold if you don't put your boots on.

Good-night, sonny, and if you've got a mother go back home to her ; you had not ought to be sitting white and empty-looking in an empty room like you are. Whatever it is you've done wrong, you go back ; she'll forgive you."

"I cannot go back. She's dead," said Arnold. "And I have not done anything wrong. I don't believe you get punished for the wrong you do : I believe you suffer for the good that's in you. But I say, I'd like to shake hands if you are going. I have lost my faith in human nature just lately. I have not met anybody worth honesty for months, but I'd like to shake."

The chair creaked as the man tilted forward in it and put out his hand.

"Don't you start judging people, good and bad, like that, sonny. Everybody's all right for their own kind. Folk are just so many balls spilled over the world ; billiard balls, pretty painted india-rubber balls, glass balls, lead balls, one or two gold ones, and all kinds. All the pretty painted rubber balls that roll about the same track keep the pictures on, and the billiard balls that keep between the cushions keep their shape. None of them are better or worse if they are kept with their own kind. The trouble is they won't, and the pretty paint gets knocked off by the ivory, the glass gets broken by the cricket ball—all one jolly family. Don't you start picking good from bad ; a bad ball means a good one dropped in among the wrong kind."

"What kind of ball am I ?" asked Arnold.

With a jerk the man thrust his hand into a breast pocket. When he drew it forth he held a Chinese puzzle ball of ivory. The puzzle was to find out how it had been made ; there was no sure way of knowing.

He extended his hand, with the ivory pillowed in the cushions of his padded palm. The puzzle ball was fragile and strange rather than beautiful. It had been carved from a single piece of ivory, but it consisted of several balls, each not thicker than a shell, one within another, one within the others. "I brought it from Hong Kong," said the seaman. Each ball was

elaborately carved and fretted with holes of the pattern, so that one could see the other carved and fretted balls, loose and ready to ricochet within. The outer shell was carved with dramatic figures ; the next with buildings, temples, pagodas, and huts ; the next with leafless flowers ; the next with deities. Arnold suspected that the patterns had been made along the lines of, and to cover, the scars made by whatever tools had been thrust through the fret-holes to scoop the ball within each ball ; but yet the innermost pill was polished, and showed round as a finished pearl, although there was no judging if it were elliptical. The whole had been fashioned with a craftsmanship as patient and fierce as life's.

It seemed that the complete thing must—*must*—have been built up from within, starting with the untouched ivory pill, and enclosing, and enclosing in the covering cases ; yet because it came from a single block of elephant bone it *must* have been made from the outside. How the puzzle ball had been made Arnold did not know.

“ Is that like what I am ? ” asked Arnold.

“ Ask yourself,” said the hairy man.

“ What kind of a ball are you ? ” asked Arnold.

The seaman very swiftly turned his hand over, with the mat of black hair on the back of it uppermost. The puzzle ball did not smash ; it fell and rolled over the dirty boards. The man picked it up and examined it.

“ Funny it doesn't break,” he said. “ I have dropped it before.” He put the delicate, unbroken thing into his pocket again. “ That's my pal coming upstairs. He mythers if he loses me for a minute. Are you coming for a tow round with me ? ”

“ The more the merrier,” pronounced the fair man, putting a foot within the room. The new man was of the type which Arnold most admired ; his moustache was bright and big, and was brushed away from his lips with the fall of bird of Paradise plumage. Arnold coveted their companionship, but he knew the men had

laid themselves out for a drinking bout, with probably a woman finale. He shook his head.

The man with the bird of Paradise moustache pulled his friend from the room by throwing an arm around him. The hairy man gave to the pull with a jolt of his cumbersome frame, and the door closed.

Arnold looked at the place where a knob or lock had been. "It must be one of the splendid things of life," he thought, "to have a friend."

Chapter II

BEFORE Arnold finished getting his boots on he felt in his pocket. The rasping of paper told him that he had touched the cigarette paper which several times had avoided his search. He took it out, unwrinkled it with thrusts of his finger, and made a cigarette.

As he lit it he suspected that there were particles of cheese in the cigarette ; he knew that a bit of brimstone off a match was sure to be there ; there always was when he made a last cigarette from the powdered tobacco which sifted to the bottom of his pocket. He swallowed very little of the tobacco dust as he made it sufficiently moist to stay in the paper tube. The spark found and ran down a channel of the overdry powder, splitting the paper with a seared line and touching the inevitable bit of brimstone. The brimstone popped, exploding the cigarette in a puff of tobacco powder.

" Well, I got one draw out of it, anyway," said Arnold, in congratulatory tone.

While he had candlelight he made his bed. He lifted up the blanket, thin as towelling, winked at the flame through the drawnthread work, and laid the blanket so that when he was under it his body would be away from the peculiar stains on the mattress. He punched his pillow into puffiness—the puffiness of air, not feathers. The pillow-case had once been a curtain with a pattern of little red roses. All pattern had been washed out of it save the red blobs of the roses which remained to catch his eye. He never saw them as he fell asleep without thinking for a second that someone had brought him a few raspberry rocks ; he never noticed them on waking without thinking that his nose had been bleeding in the night. Then he laid all his clothes on

the bed, when it looked like a stall in the Birmingham Petticoat Market.

The candle giggled as it died out.

He put his boots on and went on to the stairs. It was dark, but there were sounds and smell to guide him down. First he heard the gramophone grinding a heartening song from *The Yeomen of the Guard* :

What kind of plaint have I,
Who perish in July?
I might have had to die,
Perchance in June.

Next there was the smell of cookery, and then a fringe of warmth ; then laughter and the clatter of crocks ; and last was a cotton of light lying zigzag up the stairs where it reached from the split door-panel.

Arnold made soft his entrance into the eating-room. He suspected, with reason, that he was not the apple of the proprietor's eye. Because he had no meals on the premises the proprietor looked at him as if he accused him of secret starving. It piqued Arnold's risibility that the landlord should expect him to have at least an egg and a rasher before he left the premises each morning. A sense of incongruity need not indicate a sense of humour. Arnold was flustered with shame each time he walked between the food-littered tables without sitting down to eat.

As he stepped into the street he felt the wind as if it went through him and came out just as cold on the other side. Rabidly on the wind a song came, and the pinger-pang of banjo strings. Arnold could not see the minstrels in the vestibule of the public-house on the corner, but he examined the wares in a pawnshop so that his life might be brightened for a minute by the music.

Dey want no mo' ob de coon man's humming ;
De banjo's strumming wid a ping-bing-pang.
Ebery swell says, " To hell. Berra find anodder gell "
And de gells donna care a hang.

NH

I shall hab to goaback to Dinah.
 I shall hab to goaback and join 'er.
 Dere's lots o' piccaninnies kickin' all around de floor—
 Lots o' piccaninnies—and dere's shu' to be some more.
 If I go back to Dinah,
 She'll smash up me old banjo,
 For marriage it am no refiner.
 But I'll hab to goahome and join 'er;
 And dis coon don't want to go.

Thought Arnold, "That's one thing I can be grateful for; I'm not married."

Der ain't no rhyme, and der ain't no reason,
 De coon-song season, it am just bust bang!
 You can tell, you can yell, you can go on shouting "Well!"
 Dey don't want no tangy-tang.
 I shall hab to go aback to Dinah.
 I shall——

"I wonder if that song is funny?" thought Arnold.
 "I wish I had a sense of humour, so that I could tell.
 I wonder if I should be a comical figure in a book. I
 wonder if God thinks I'm comical. I wonder if I can
 spare enough for a mug of hot tea."

He decided, after feeling the milled edges in his pocket, that he could not afford it but must have it. He crossed West India Dock Road to a little marble-tabled café. As he stood at the counter the display of cakes convinced him that he was inordinately hungry, and not, as he supposed, hungry in moderation. It was bad enough seeing the food in shop windows, but it was madness to resist longer when the sandwiches were at his elbows—ham at one and cheese at the other.

"Well," he thought, "there's something to be said for resisting and being mad. I will have tea and a warm now, and something to eat later, and get a second warm. Brains? Rather!" Aloud he said, "A sandwich and a mug of tea." He raised his eyebrows at himself as he said it.

The proprietress was Italian, but her shoulders were

passive. She asked if he wanted ham or beef or cheese. He selected a ham slice, with due consideration and titillating slowness. He sat as near the stove as he could and began to eat before he drank.

Two Hindoos in fezes performed the rites of drinking alien coffee, two negroes syncopated their chatter with noisy mastication, a trio of Scandinavians of almost silver blondness clucked in occasional commentary; everyone tended to make him feel despairingly English.

The pig which had surrendered its life to provide him with sustenance had evidently been fed in a fishing district. He liked fish and he liked ham, but he liked them separate. The mustard spoon was gritty with spilled sugar. He applied the mustard lavishly in the hope of destroying the flavour of fish; it destroyed the flavour of ham.

Among the cosmopolitan customers came a group essentially English. It was composed of men with faces charcoaled in misrepresentation of Ethiopian minstrels. They were the singers whom Arnold had listened to. They wore the raiment of the mid-Christy period, and as they entered they played and sang in a manner that did not atone for one-tenth of their garb, which proclaimed that they had settled down to the business of street singing as a paying means of livelihood, and had not been speared into it by misfortune. However, they paid for what they had.

The genuine negroes in the corner stuck their thumbs in the armpits of their fancy vests, but they were easily outnegroed. The bass with tonsillitis went to one of the negroes and shook his collecting-box; the coloured man shook his head simultaneously.

Another minstrel (the bass without tonsillitis and almost without bass) went to the attack, and said pleadingly, "Mammysick; piccaninnysick."

"It only needs," thought Arnold, "for the tenor to sing 'Land of Hope and Glory'!"

"Oh!" said the proprietress to him, "it is a great thing being able to speak the language." He did not

know quite what she meant, but concluded that she thought the minstrels were speaking in the African's language.

"Mammy cry; piccaninny cry," said the blackened Englishman, still shaking his penny-box. The negro grinned with his blister-like lips and swaddled his thumbs deeper in his offensive armpits.

"Now I wonder if that is humorous," thought Arnold.

Quite suddenly he saw a picture before his eyes as plainly as if a cinematograph had cast it on the asbestos screen, colourless but detailed. He saw naked black men squatting between swamp reeds and peeping at a proud white ship. And with no explanation for the change he mentally visualised immediately afterwards the red-haired man swaying above a steaming coffee-cup.

"Just smell that did it," he said to himself. The Hindoos' cups had been refilled; there was a sea-kiss in every fold of the Scandinavians' clothes; the negroes were negroes.

"There's one thing to be thankful for," thought Arnold; "four of the five senses are supplied without expense."

He pushed out from the tables and went into the wind-lashed street. The moon was now dodging in and out of clouds as if it were tormented between fear and inquisitiveness. The thoroughfare was ochreish with lamplight. He turned down Elephant Street, and noted as he walked the elfin gladness of the gutter children. There were children with bare feet playing at football. They kicked the full-sized ball with bare toes and dribbled with children who wore boots. Half a dozen times he imagined the crunch of bare toes under the pounding boots, but the children were always shouting at top pitch of excitement.

Their glee schooled his misery. "Misery is not circumstance; it is a state of thought rather than of being," he thought. "Why should I be miserable? These poor little brats are not. We are wonderful creations. Neglect a cat or a dog or a bird, and it dies;

starve us and perish us with cold, and we live on and live on." He winced ; a boot had crushed toes. He heard the thing happen, but he heard no cry. The boy who had been trodden limped out of the game and leaned in an angle of the railway arch. He shut his eyes and rocked his tiny body against the walls of the angle. Tears squeezed out from between his shut lids, and his mouth worked.

The boy opened his eyes. He did not look at Arnold ; he followed with his glance the progress of the game. "Goal!" he shouted, and hugged his foot.

"I am born of the gutter," said Arnold. "Little as I have to be proud of, that is something of a ribbon to wear. My slum birth ought to help me here in Limehouse. But it doesn't. I ought to feel at home, in my own country, among my own people ; but I do not. I am alien. According to all common sense, it should be easier for me to drag through a month here than it would be for—say a man in the Civil Service. Yet it isn't ; this place could not be more detestable to him than it is to me, hungry or not hungry."

He turned into Four Horse Street. On the opposite side of the road a man who sold hot chestnuts had finished business for the day and was taking off his coat in a mean little fruit-shop. He returned to his barrow, and, after pushing it a few yards down the street, emptied the pan of glowing embers into the gutter.

From their play-holes came galloping wild little children. They lay down to the red coal and puffed them to flame. Then with paper and garbage they started bonfires about roadway and pavement.

Arnold crossed the street. He was of constabulary physique, and this at times had been of service to him and at times the reverse. It certainly did not cow the roast-chestnut man, who glowered at him and said, "You'll be able to recognise me again?"

Arnold continued to stare intently at the man, wishing thus to irritate him to provide an excuse for violence.

“Shan’t yer?” demanded the man.

“I shall.”

“An’ I shall be able to tell you,” snarled the man. He took up the handles of his barrow and went trundling it away from his shop. Seemingly he garaged elsewhere. As he reached the corner he shouted back, “An’ yer little dog!”

“Wit,” thought Arnold.

The children danced through the blazes, flirting their tattered dresses in the brand-new beauty of fire; small, drab pagans worshipping brightness. The giver of these joys returned to his shop, took up his coat, and passed into an inner room.

Arnold was fortunate; he found the police officer he sought almost promptly. “Oh, they are always at it,” said the constable, in response to what struck him as a crank request.

“But I can put you on the man that started it,” exclaimed Arnold. “I’ll go to the shop and fetch him out.”

“It won’t do any harm if I warn him, anyhow.”

The little fruit-store looked repellently cold with that suggestion of chill which is given by piled-up vegetables; cabbages which have had the frost on them; celery; oranges which suggested to the teeth the ice of their wine; green lemons; potatoes to which the soggy earth still clung, clay cold. A man shuffled out from behind the inner door, thrusting his way through a canopy hanging of stringed onions and viscid rabbit-skins. His face had the texture and colour of a bruised pomegranate, and his brown eyes and teeth showed as bad seeds in the bursts of pomegranate rind. He was not the man who had tipped the hot ashes.

No! No man who roast the chestnuts lived there. No, the gentleman make some little, little mistake. The man made a beating movement with his cedarwood hands.

“Well, you’d better let me have a bucket of water to put it out,” said the officer.

Slightly dissatisfied, Arnold walked away without

decision, without fixed destination. He walked slowly because of soreness ; he walked sadly because of the playing children who had no saviour.

Down a side street, again he saw the moon, now lifted like a vision of the Holy Grail above the sluggish river into which, beneath it, it had spilled some of its precious golden blood.

For a moment he forgot the children. Moon-bemused, this broom-stick knight walked nearer to see the purge of the precious stain on the river ripples. The darkling background, the half-seen, half-imagined foreground, the spill of radiance on the lava dullness, all made him long for his palette again, that he might show to the million who do not see, what beauteous tones lie between brown and purple, purple and grey, and grey and brown.

He stood at various points along the quay to choose what his picture should embrace did he intend to paint it. A little jetty ran out to a landing-stage ; he would avoid that ; the quickened colour behind the window-blinds of the hut office would be disturbing. He found his point of vantage, and regarded his painting on the canvas of his mind, and forgot that he was sore and pierced by cold.

The ripples were stilled for a moment ; the rose shape of the moon swayed full-blown on the water for the moment, and then the flower broke open, over-blown, and the scattered petals of it danced upon the tide.

There were children on the quay, and their wise nonsense reached him past his moon-dreams. He shivered, and screwed his body to and fro at the hips, chafing slight warmth from his tighter garments. The quay was about five hundred yards long, and had a sheer drop of many feet to the water, but there was no rail or safeguard along it. The children playing there were tiny children, three, four, and five years of age. There were no houses near enough for anyone to hinder a mishap. The quay was backed by warehouses, gloomy with Sabbath desertion, and the children were playing

at shop with wares of mud and refuse upon a doorstep. The river called them.

Stealthily urgent, the river called with gasping insistency. It *did* call. He went back to the edge to listen to it. Yes, it called ; it called him, called him with a taunting splash and scoffing withdrawal, as if it said " Bah ! "

" Bah ! It cannot be colder under the water than it is in the freezing air."

Arnold knew precisely what it was to drown. He had once been revived after lying unconscious in the water for a short while. Now he looked down at the callous river as he went over the incident in his mind. It had not been too bad to bear again. It was when he was about eighteen—in the summer when he was eighteen in the April ; 1905. The heat had suffused him with desire to swim in one of the baths which the Birmingham City Council built about the city. Having no friend who could or would teach him the strokes, he went alone. There were many bathers on his first night. He noticed that those who were having instruction kept to the shallow end, and he thought it best to be with them. He watched the manner of accomplished diving, then raised his hands, locked his thumbs, leaned from the hips, and tilted into the shallow water.

His head struck the enamel bricks with a crack ; he was more than five feet ten inches in his height, and the shallow end was only four feet deep. He rolled over and over like a ninepin under the spout of a rain-water butt before a man assisted him up the slippery steps.

After a while he chatted with the man who had helped him.

" Had enough for the first time ? " said the man, chuckling.

" I have really, but I shall have to dive in again or my nerve will be gone, and I want to be able to face water again," said Arnold.

" Well, you won't think of diving if you do go in ? " asked the man.

"I shall never dive again if I don't," said Arnold, "and it's silly to flop."

"Then you go in at the deep end, and I'll wait in the water to support you to the side."

"I'll be glad if you would. I'm as right as a trivet again now. I'll go off the top board."

The man gasped. "Oh, of course, I forgot," he said, with a bluff laugh, "it's your ignorance. Only the best chaps go off the top board. I don't go more than the third, and I do three-quarters of a mile on the trudge."

"If you'll be waiting in the water I shall go off the top," said Arnold. "Once, at any rate."

"Ar, *once*, at any rate!" said the man, with a sneer of raillery. "It looks easy, but if you fall flat you rip your belly open with the blow of the water. I'm not out to see anybody disembowelled. I've seen it once."

"You'll wait in the water for me?" enquired Arnold.

The man looked slowly up and down Arnold's body as if he were a student in an anatomy class seeking an abnormal muscle. Arnold was not evasive of the stare. Without being vain, he knew that his physique was fine; also the man who examined to see what sort of animal he was was fine, but of the swarthy type.

"Yes, I'll wait for you, kid, but you won't dive down, all the same," was the reply. "Kid" and "Kiddy" are terms used in Birmingham more as expressions of kindness than familiarity.

"Why not?" asked Arnold intolerantly.

"Because when you look down at the water from the top board it looks miles and miles, and then miles. The water don't look like water. It's a green enamel pavement waiting for you. *Bump!*"

"You'll wait for me then?" said Arnold, as they walked along the matting spread on the side-walk.

"Yes. And if you do dive—you may be a dark horse—as you touch the water turn up your fingers,

like this—as you touch the water, mind ; it will bring you to the top nicely.”

“ Shall I have time to think about it ? ”

“ I have time to reckon up my overtime when I come off the third ; I should say I’d have time to do it if I came off the top. I’ll jump in here. Go up and look down and remember you have just cracked your skull.”

“ I can remember that,” said Arnold ruefully. “ But shan’t you be too far away ? ”

“ No fear. The force of a dive would carry you this far.”

Arnold, left alone, realised that all the bathers, having seen his mishap, had ceased swimming and were watching him. He walked cavalierly to the pyramid framework of the diving-boards and mounted the first step. He found that he had to climb to reach the next. When he stood upon the top board he felt very near to the ceiling. Below him, the men who stood posed around the green lawn of water suggested a scene from an Eastern ballet.

He raised his hands and locked his thumbs, leaned forward from the waist, and, without spring, curved over forward from the board. He had expected a rush downward and a splash ; instead, he felt the change of his position ; the clean, slow-motion glide of his feet above his head ; then the sensation of cleaving birdlike through the air which makes the thrill of the first high dive, taken calmly, done perfectly, an unrivalled shock of delight. Then came the little fire-flash of possible fear when there was nothing but green water in the range of his vision, when it seemed impossible that the water was water and not green marble.

He prepared the curve of his fingers an instant before they touched water. He was in the water, but the sweep of his glide swept without altering the line of his body from outstretched fingers to outstretched toes. He felt that it was so. It was ecstasy. As he passed levelly under the water, with the neat bricks running under him, he thanked heaven for a tuned

physique, which told everything it felt to his attentive brain.

He was nearing something in the bright water, something which lay back on the greenness to shape way for him. It was the man who waited for him. Arnold touched against him, his breast ran up the man's breast, and he was standing.

"You've been kidding me," said the swarthy man. "That was the most beautiful dive of its kind I have seen. Perfect."

Arnold blinked; electric light in spots of water was in his eyes; there was murmured approbation from the men on the sides, and the smother of them entering their preferred element.

"No, really," said Arnold, "I have never been in the baths before."

By way of reply, the man turned on to his back and kicked fountains over Arnold.

"Don't go away," exclaimed Arnold. "How am I going to get out?"

"Why, walk out; you are standing, aren't you?" said the man. He turned, curled as a prawn, and swam under Arnold's legs, capsising and submerging him in the water.

When Arnold had floundered, swallowed water, and struggled to his feet again the swarthy man was floating some distance away, basking on the water, comfortable as a painted god on a painted cloud. He made little fin flutterings with his fingers which brought him back, lazily moving.

"You overdid that bit, kiddy," he said. "A duffer would not have floundered so much."

"Have it your own way," said Arnold. "But thanks for minding me all the same. Do you mind swimming on a bit so that I can walk out? My dressing-room is on that side."

The man gave a delighted shout, and again pushed Arnold under water.

Arnold had learned to swim half a dozen lengths of the bath before he next met the swarthy man. It was

upon a Saturday afternoon. He found on entering the baths that there was only one other swimmer there, and that it was his doubting but obliging friend.

"Come to learn to dive?" called the man, his accent somewhat turned from fluency by the forbidden cigarette which he was smoking as he slowly swam.

"No, I've come to see how many lengths I can do. I did six last time."

The man pulled at his cigarette with quick, brief puffs which was laughter. "Hark at him, Bill," he called to the attendant, but the attendant was dozing in his glass house.

The sunlight glared through the skylight on to the promenade about the water. The man climbed out, and, after wringing his red slips, laid them in one of the patches of sunshine and himself lay on his back in another. He chatted while Arnold undressed and swam his first few lengths. After which he rose, and, going into his dressing-box, began singing a bawdy song, substituting a slap of his hand for certain recurrent words.

Arnold found that when he had swum seven lengths he was almost exhausted, but as he was then in the shallow end, and could desist when he chose, he touched the rail, turned, and began the return journey. After several more strokes (he could only do the breast stroke) he found that he had "got his second wind."

He had heard the swimmers refer to getting their second wind, but had not been certain what they meant. He had now found that when he had done several tired strokes more that a return of strength came to him, not vital energy, but a feeling that he could go on quietly swimming for ever without the exertion telling on him.

He continued with a steady stroke which was not tiring. It scarcely required effort to continue; it was like sleep-swimming. After the eleventh length he touched the bar at the deep end and turned. Four

strokes brought him well away from the side. He was in deep water when his strength suddenly and collapsingly failed. He made wild kicks and plunges, trusting to get a second second wind, or a third wind, or anything which would keep him afloat. He could have dog paddled, but he knew nothing of the manœuvre. "I feel as if I'm filleted," he thought. "*I am going under!*"

He shouted for help. The swarthy man did not hear because of his own lusty singing. The attendant heard, but thought that the men were noisily jesting. He had seen that they were friendly, and knew that the one was an expert swimmer and that the other was passable.

Arnold sank.

He sank, not as stone, nor even as a soaked sponge does, but as if a giant had stretched a hand and put palm to the top of his head, and slowly forced him down. His feet touched the bottom and he lay backward, straight but inclining from the upright. He began to rise again slowly, very slowly. When he felt that he *must* be emerging he tried to shout, but swallowed water. He was not near the top. He swallowed more water; drew in water instead of the gracious air for which he was so greedy.

Although he had seemed slow in ascending, his eyes were above the surface but an instant; an instant in which he struggled and took a great draught of water. He sank, again taking water; hideous water, a swelling gout of water. He knew that he should not attempt to breathe before he reached the air, but was forced to attempt it. He touched the bottom. He felt riveted there by pegs between his toes.

There was a crawling age of slowness in which he was about to rise again; an age in which he had time for a million thoughts, yet had no thought. He was conscious only of his predicament. His hands were above his head. He knew that they should not be above his head, but he could not pull them down. His head was back, and the water was solid upon his

eyes. The water was brilliantly clear and blindingly green. He felt the press of it as if he were a bubble in cooling glass, a bubble constrained yet struggling for release. He could see his forearms and the pads of his fingers, corpse white, preserved in the greenness which shone.

He had no thought. He felt. He knew the curse of eternity in agelong waiting while he was about to rise. He was rising. He left the floor. If time had stood still before, it now retraced its passage through all of eternity that had been. The moments age by age increased, and brought him to the surface again.

The light intensified to whiteness—light which blasted sight to keener vision, with its intenser brightness, its intense clarity. In his ears rang the ringing of many and many tiny bells, not one of which could have been bigger than a seed. The pressure of solidity about his body gave way to a thinness, to nothing. He could bear the light; he could bear the ringing; he could bear the glorious gladness somewhere in the middle of himself. Time he had no need to bear; eternity was ended; he had lost consciousness.

He knew perfectly well what it was like to die by drowning; for him it was the curse of empty eternities.

It had been slow work, bringing him back to life. His mishap had not been discovered until he had lain in the water some little while. It was very strange yet ordinary to revive. He had said, "Where am I?" And, as he had said it, thought, "People say that when they have fainted; I must have fainted." At first he did not recognise the baths, nor his swarthy friend, who was jerking his arms and perspiring freely. They refused to let him enter the water again to regain his nerve, and he had not swum since. Yet he knew he would not be able to drown here by the quay.

He knew that as soon as he was in the water all his fighting instincts would rouse, and he would not make the mistakes which were disastrous before. If nothing else would make him fight, the proximity of that eternity of creeping up through glass he was embedded in, a

million years an inch, would make him fight ; would make him save himself despite himself.

Unless, of course, someone should stun him and knock him in. There was no hope of it ; Limehouse and life were cruel in the wrong manner or to the wrong people.

Chapter III

ARNOLD walked away from the little quay; the love-orphans keeping shop with dirt; the cold, lapping river on which bobbed the scattered reflection of the moon, as if an apron full of canary feathers had been shaken into the water. He came to the street and saw, disappearing into a passage, one of those stealthy men who sift from shadow to shadow at night in Limehouse, slovenly swift and covetous of silence, as if they roll along on rubber balls.

"Me, in a month's time," he said.

His interest returned to food, and he made his way in search of a cheap eating-house. He came to several which were closed. He came to the high wall of the docks, and continued beside it until he came to West India Dock Road. He crossed to Penny Fields, seeking the cheapest shop. He came to several of the Chinese houses, with strange lettering characters rubbed off from the whitening smeared over the windows—bills of fare. No longer did he believe that the meaner the shop the cheaper the fare. He passed the majority of them, mistrusting their suggestion of Oriental stealth.

At last he turned to one that had an air of some frankness. It was bare of furniture. The Chinese clerk who was making out his accounts with a penbrush waved him vaguely towards the stairs. He reached the dining-room, which had been made by taking down a dividing wall between two bedrooms without troubling to disguise the method. There were in the room long trestle tables and wooden benches and an uncarpeted floor—all of them things to give back sound from knock or footfall; there was a fire to be raked, china to be

clicked and rattled ; there were also a score of Chinese, never still, and with much to say among themselves. To Arnold, waiting there for his coffee, it appeared as if the world and all that was therein was made of velvet, so padded soft was the sound of living.

A fair-haired English girl came to him. She was of middle height and not truly handsome, but she showed as a giant beauty compared with the scattering of Chinese men.

"A cup of coffee, please," he said.

"Anything else?" she asked, making afterwards a smile without altering her lip curve. She did it by bringing two dimples to her cheek. Arnold liked that little smile ; he thought it must be very difficult to do or very, very easy. It was one of Bennetta's smiles ; the one she used when she was listening and did not wish to interrupt with "Yes," or "No," or "Of course, Mr. Brooke."

"No, thank you," he replied. He starved, but he starved politely.

The girl did not bring his coffee immediately ; she delayed to talk to pattering men upon the stairs. He did not fret at waiting ; although he was not near the peacock's feather heart of the room fire he was in the raying fringe of its warmth. She set the cup before him. He gladdened in the eddying of heat from the china as he touched the handle. It had become one of his ambitions to eat a meal served upon a table spread with a cloth. As he put the pennies on the bare board he did not look at the girl, but thought of a table-cloth, a starched white cloth with ridges from the folding.

The girl picked up the coins and deliberately but covertly tapped his finger as she did so. Arnold looked up. None of the men had their faces towards him, but he knew they watched. He was the foreigner in the room ; also he was big enough to be in the police force.

Having drawn his attention, the girl swiftly directed her glance above his head to the corner window and then deflected it downwards. She picked the money up and left him.

OH

"She intimated the front door," he concluded. "What does she mean? Get out? The last thing that could be said is that she was provocative; yet she wanted me to understand something. My best course will be to appear to suspect nothing. It requires skill, not to be too much at ease when one is warned."

Nothing happened. He did not leave the restaurant until he was quite warmed. The girl did not look at him again, but he remembered her directing glance, and nerved himself to meet the unknown as he walked down the stairs.

He realised what she had sought to intimate as soon as he reached the lower room. Lounging in the shop doorway, with his limbs so disposed that it was not possible to leave the shop without either touching him or requesting him to move, was the chestnut vender.

"So," thought Arnold, "that hulk expects me to push past him and give him the opportunity to start trouble, when his friends, who are doubtless handy, will gather round."

With this conviction Arnold walked to the doorway. He was joyed that the girl had given him self-possession. Before he reached the door the slippered Chinese clerk desisted from painting crippled spiders in his ledger and spoke to the man, who made passage.

"He wishes me no good," thought Arnold. "That must have been he watching me by the river. Funny; I wanted someone to knock me in just then, and he was quite close and willing—but the children were there. Are the children there still?"

He left Penny Fields and resolved to return to the river, trusting his enemy to follow. He glanced over his shoulder, timid lest the man should not be behind. The man was walking circumspectly a few yards away.

The little quay was deserted. The broken ornament of the moon, which had become an obsession to Arnold, littered the width of the river. At the end of the jetty lamps glittered on a boat, but the craft was far enough away. Arnold stood passively on the coping, his back to the warehouses.

The ripples were no longer little waves. Seen from this position, the mirrored moon was unbroken. It folded and spread and folded like an emblem worked upon a fluttered flag.

"Thank heaven there is nobody to care," muttered Arnold.

The tortured oval of the moon writhed, fold from fold. There was no splash, no gurgle, in the sob of the water.

"*Ah!*"

The assailants knew their business. A coat had been flung over his head, and he was pulled backwards to the ground, not struck into the water. This was not what he wanted! They were robbing him. There were several hands about him, tearing off his coat, gripping him, prodding in his pockets.

This was not what he wanted; he wanted the river. He began to struggle. The man kneeling on his head shifted his knee, and a boot came under it, kicking Arnold unconscious.

As the spirit slowly forces its way back into its mortal habitation with return of consciousness, memory is the last servant to be quickened. Arnold first had knowledge of his existence, then the slow bruise of all his soreness and pain. Dark sight was given him; he was pent in by brickwork and rested on a narrow ledge.

He raised an arm to examine his surroundings, and, doing so, toppled from the ledge down the short cliff of a wall. He struck with a crash upon the pavement. He saw that he had been lying on the sill of a warehouse doorway.

The coracle of the moon, floating and bobbing on the water, brought memory back. Evidently he had been lifted to the sill to escape casual notice. His overcoat had been taken, and his waistcoat sewn with shillings was gone. There was something the matter with his head—— Of course, they had kicked him.

He struggled to his feet, and with accumulated misery sought through his pockets to estimate his loss.

He discovered a shilling and then a threepenny bit in a corner.

He laughed bitterly, and deliberately went to the water's edge. "Bitterness ; and the next thing will be self-pity," he said scathingly as he stood on the brink. His fingers were fastening his coat. He stopped, wrenching at a button, as he asked himself what difference it made, buttoned or unbuttoned ; if they found him clothed or naked, unrecognisable or Arnold Brooke.

He leaned over the edge. Then he laughed more wildly than before. *The tide was out !* Nothing but a stretch of mud for him to fall into !

"Slime," he exclaimed, and added with feeble pettishness, "Everything is against me ; the tide's gone out now."

Chapter IV

WHEN Arnold had left the riverside quay and reached his hotel he found it shuttered for the night; that was his next alarming discovery. He battered at the door. Echoes mocked him.

"All said and done," said Arnold, "there is something comic about all this. At this point a policeman should walk on and charge me with loitering without visible means of support—one of those tight and shiny-skinned policemen who have to have the buckle-prong through the last hole of the belt, or a doughy-fleshed one who specialises in drunks."

But the policeman whom Arnold met on the corner was quite without affront of fat, which gave Arnold courage to confide in him. "I am locked out of my hotel; what do you advise?"

"You will have a job to get in anywhere at this time of night."

"Well, what I mean," said Arnold, "if I am stopped once or twice for hanging about, I shall not get into trouble with your people for being a vagrant?"

"Oh, not as it is. Wait a bit. There is a place where you might get in. Under ordinary circumstances I shouldn't advise you to try it; still, you might ask at 'The Sailors' Rest' in Cammomile Street. It's open all night. You can't expect much for a tanner a night, but you will be under cover. That's Cammomile Street, with the pub on the corner."

Arnold found that what at first and second sight appeared to be a factory was in truth a sailors' rest. It was a flat building with many iron windows, and over the arch of the gatelike doors a lamp was lit.

There were three men seated at the table in the "Manager's Room."

"Can I get a bed here for the night?"

"Ar."

"How much?"

"A tanner."

Arnold produced his shilling and secured the change. The printed receipt was ornamented with ships at sea, Union Jacks, and gripping hands, like a design for a tattoo upon a sailor's chest. The spokesman kicked one of his comrades on the ankle and said, "Put him in No. 14."

The jailer-faced comrade rose, jingled his bunch of keys, and gruffly said, "Come on, No. 14."

Arnold followed. In the gloomy passage he knocked against another late-comer and said he was sorry, at which the jailer laughed satirically. They reached a big, bare room. Possibly it had once been the principal shop in a factory. The walls were of naked brick, and showed here and there when a flicker of flame started among the glowing embers of a brazier in a cavernous recess before which were stretched negroes on narrow benches.

None of the coloured men wore more than trousers, the reason being obvious in the shirts and socks which dangled, steaming, round the fire. Two only were waiting for their whole wardrobe to dry. As Arnold crossed to an arch and a flight of stone steps, the negroes turned their eyes toward him, so that the whites of their eyes had the sheen of peeled onions. Their movement and breathing rippled the gilt of firelight about their ebony. The two nearest the fire were like forceful living bronzes; the others, seen completely only when the flame leaped, seemed created from the shadows, which in turn they made palpitating and human.

A pencil point of blue flame, burning at the gas-jet upon the floor above, showed Arnold the position of horse-box No. 14. A long row of doors, close together, stretched down one wall; a chair was placed for the convenience of the officials or the curious who wished

to assure themselves of the demeanour of the inmates. The sleep-groans made disconcerting cacophony. The atmosphere had an odour unlike, in rebuff, anything which Arnold had previously encountered. It appalled the palate more than the nostrils. Behind one of the doors a man was heard to be violently sick ; Arnold wondered if this was another white man or only a negro who had been drinking too much.

The guide unlocked the door of No. 14 and went away. Arnold found it a narrow compartment, which contained a box of drawers and a bed on which had been flung a cahier of calico sheets and blankets. Light came from the street through the iron-framed window. Wire netting was stretched across the top of the cubicle.

"I 'specs I's de only white rooster in this yer chick'n run. What a bilge !" muttered Arnold, feeling if the wire netting was stapled down.

Limp at the wrists from weariness, aching and bruised, he sat upon the edge of the bed and made feeble attempts to unlace his boots, but sank down to the pillow in sleep before he had released the knotting.

Sleep is the tenderest of all His angels ; but she is the one fickle. At times she will not come when weariness, or sorrow, or loneliness make plaint for her ; seldom she answers when pain calls ; but when these weep together she, the whitest-winged, with her fluttering stills their poignancy. Sleep came arrestingly to Arnold—that dominating sleep which disbands the senses.

He slept like stone.

Sleep did not restore his soul to his body until the coloured men had been awake some time. His upward glance showed him that the wire netting was fluffy with dust ; the pressure of his bruised limbs against the bed made waking pain ; he heard the chirrup and boom of the negroes, who seemed blithe ; they sang and called in high treble and sonorous bass ; for his palate and nostrils there was the odour which was now cold and clammy. So were his five senses annoyed on waking.

He lurched off the bed and made his toilet by shaking

himself. He went outside his door among the merry niggers. Their conversations started in enterprising little bursts and ended in verbal giggles. Each one excited his limbs to enforce his speech, as if gesture supplied adjectives, and facial contortions were adverbs in a limited vocabulary. Rather than gestures they were antics. "If a pug had the agility of a whippet, so might he scratch his ear," thought Arnold, watching them at the washing basins.

He altered his mind about washing there. He fancied the water was tainted; he knew the towel reeked. He was curious as to the daylight appearance of the barn where the shirts had been drying. It was transformed to a dining-sitting-sprawling room. Trestled tables were about between the benches; soft-bodied black men sat mouthing their food; a glazed partition enclosed a space where meals were prepared and served in slabs. One man had bread and dripping coated with mustard, but most were eating thick rashers of tallowy bacon, finding satisfaction in feeling it stretch and catapult between their teeth and fingers. And Arnold learned the first of the mysteries of hunger—food can disgust a hungry man.

He solved the money problem of his immediate future on the way to his lodgings. Although he could not pawn his clothes, he could sell them and his suitcase, which would no longer be required, to a second-hand dealer. As he entered the hotel the proprietor smiled at him for the first time. Arnold was reminded that the bruise on his cheek did not improve his features. He went up to his room and made hesitating pro and con selection from his clothes. He kept the warmest, which were not the newest. The macintosh he possessed was but poor substitute for the fleece he had been robbed of.

He felt a little press of alarm as he recognised what before he had not noticed—the macintosh was of the same colour as that worn by the red-haired man. "I'm getting superstitious," he said, and then, snatching up the garment, "What if I *am* to have his fate! It is a

worthy mantle ; it is I who am unworthy." He shivered and threw the coat on to the bed. "Macintosh always does feel cold to the touch," he mumbled, as if there was need to excuse the shiver.

He picked up the macintosh again, and slipped his arms into the sleeves and buttoned it. He pouched it round his breast with a sudden snatch. "Mm, it is getting loose, but not so very loose—not yet. I wonder where they buried him ; if he will ever have one pilgrim to his pauper shrine. *Pauper shrine!* No, it is the relics within which make princely or poor shrine. What mad ideas ! Of course, he wouldn't be buried at all. Being a pauper and unclaimed, his remains would be handed over to the medical students. They'd like him ; no messy fat ; the young man's corpse with all the advantages of an old one's. *A prophet does not respect his own country*, but I begin to half admire Birmingstow ; she is so thorough when she does deliver herself of an artist. I suppose there have been others ; I suppose there will be more from her."

He passed from speaking his thoughts aloud to the second stage of the lonely man's conversation—speaking and answering, answering and questioning again ; the stage which is known in Birmingstow as "talking to the devil."

"It is easy for you to grumble and find faults with Birmingstow ; being great, she can afford to wear her faults outside. There is nothing clever in finding fault ; find the cure." Arnold tossed his hand and gave the whinnying laugh which was so unlike his own.

He was pacing the room. His voice rose higher as he mocked himself. "Find the cure ! The cure ? Why should I seek a cure, knowing there is none ? It is not my province. Admit I am an expert—but an expert in failures. As an expert I diagnose this case. Birmingstow nourishes her greatness on the things which are poisonous to art, so that when she gives birth to an artist her milk cannot help but poison him." He flung his hands joyously forward and laughed and

laughed, but stopped with a jerk of breath. "An expert in failures."

He sat down upon the corner of the bed. "Failure," he repeated, as he pushed forward his hands along the blanket until it was ruckled to the pillow. He sank his shoulders to his knuckles and stretched himself upon the bed, his head between his clenched hands, and not sleep came, but tears. They were but the tears of exhaustion.

He wept until at length he knew that he was weeping, and until thought paced quietly with his sobs, so that he realised that it was best for him to submit freely to the merciful emotion and not check it. His abandonment spent itself, and he lay still and calm for a space, telling himself that even if he was becoming insane, passionate self-analysis would only hasten the climax. He would try never to think about himself again.

He did not understand that his emotional outbreak was only hysteria, and not insanity taking away the first scoop of beautiful brain. When he rose from the bed he shivered again at the cold touch of the macintosh.

His farewell to the proprietor of the paltry hotel was brief. "I don't owe anything here, do I?" he said.

"No."

Arnold took his suit-case and clothes to a Jew who dealt in such things. The dealer, after tweaking the clothes with his thumb and finger, offered seven-and-sixpence for the two suits, the case, and a pair of shoes. Arnold asked how much he would give him without counting in the shoes. The dealer said, "Four shillings." "That will be all right then," said Arnold. "You give me the three-and-six for the shoes and I'll go on wearing the clothes a bit longer." "I don't want the shoes for three-and-six. I don't want any of the things. I offer you a good price, but I don't want them. I offer the seven-and-six because you look weak and starving. I think you steal the clothes and grow a moustache to sell them. You get me into trouble in my shop. Go

away." "Well and good," said Arnold. "Give me the seven-and-six."

Seven shillings and sixpence can make a new world. Coming unexpectedly as it did to Arnold, with only the ideas, notice, and the preparation for the sale, it had all the thrill to be derived from a letter stating that Miss Caroline Teston, of Brantwood House, Brantwood, co. Sussex, your aunt, died on the sixteenth inst., leaving to you the whole of her estate.

Seven shillings and sixpence can restore youth to the world-wizened at twenty-four—almost. Arnold gave himself up to the joy of the scrape of his thumbnail on the milled edges as he walked, hands in pockets, from the shop. He flushed with joy at touch of them ; he made little stories about them ; he let fancy languish on them. He stiffened with fear at touch of them, and took them out one by one and bit the Jew's coin. He jingled them in his pocket before a jeweller's shop. He felt frantically round the seams, fearing a hole in the lining. He counted, miscounted, and miscounted them again, by letting them squeeze from his palm, one at a time, to the point of his pocket. He was sinfully and feverishly exalted when he counted one too many ; was aghast when he counted one too few ; was philosophic when he counted them correctly—seven shillings and sixpence ; youth's ransom.

He bought his loaf of bread early, and treated himself to a loop of pig's pudding (black pudding he believed to be the more stylish name for it). It was made from fat and pig's blood, groats, rice, and garlic packed tight in a brittle sausage skin, which cracked rather than ripped. He ate it seated in the churchyard and read the names of the happy dead whom now he did not envy. It was good to think that he was going to give starvation a run for its money. He put his hand in his pocket and splashed the coins about his fingers up to the knuckles ; he felt excited by his prospects, but he wished the weather was not quite so chilly.

He went into the High Street and began walking briskly, that he might have his blisters at a disadvantage

by being at his journey's end when they grew insufferable. He would get into a locality where he could rent an empty room; that would be shelter of the cheaper kind.

He fancied that people looked intently at him as he approached or passed them. Possibly it was because of the bruise. A girl in sleek furs, who had glanced as she passed in front of him, turned deliberately and looked at his face. Her face was powdered white; her lips were like blood on a hem of linen. Despite this day make-up of a harlot, her gaze was dispassionate. A nun-faced woman in mourning held his glance for a moment, then let it go.

"It seems to be my eyes they look at," he thought. "In this city of weird and peculiar people, is there something specially peculiar about me, or am I grown self-conscious because there is only me in all the world for me to think about?"

He crossed the road to where a mirror held principal place in a hairdresser's window. He examined his reflection critically. "I can't see anything wrong," he muttered. "My eyes are rather greener than usual, but that's only because I am excited. It isn't my eyes, and I am not funny elsewhere. Is it—— Ah!"

He started as he saw the rare attraction which arrested. On either of his cheek-blades a vivid flash of blush had suddenly come and suddenly gone. "My God! How did I do that?" He stood in the middle of the pavement ignoring wayfarers. He tried to repeat the magical conjuring of his blood, but remained plaster white. Yet it happened again as he turned away, and was gone as he turned back to detect it.

"It's a trick of my brain. It's full of tricks. Soon I shall begin to believe that the soul of the red-haired man has stolen my body to live in again, or I shall begin to think that I really am mad. The white macintosh, my face thin above it, and now this lightning blush of his! How he fell crash on that marble floor. I have never fainted yet; I wonder if that was his first time. Did I do right in burning those last relics of his work?"

He might have thought them of no account, but——
Yes! Always yes! I did right; she is unworthy.
Why should I whet my sorrow on such a theme? ”

The discovery of this strange peculiarity quickened his alert dread of becoming a familiar figure in any locality. Having himself been intrigued by the same rare flickering of flame on the cheeks of the red-haired man, he knew the fascination of watching for it to glow or die again once it had been noticed. His sensitiveness could not brook that where he went he was familiarly known and scorned. He felt that there was laid on him the curse of the Wandering Jew without his having committed such sin. His quickened dread sent him as far from Limehouse and Whitechapel as his staying powers permitted.

Long after he was sick—tired, and footsore to rawness he came to Bolsover Street, which runs parallel with Great Portland Street. In one of the windows he saw a notice scrawled on the back of a cigarette box lid :

A ROom to let.

As he knocked at the door he wondered if it was a man or a woman who had not had the pertinacity to carry out the first intention of capitals to the end of the line. The knocker in his hand was polished, but the brass ornament it struck on had not been cleaned. The glass of the fanlight had been wiped as high as a man could reach from the step. Arnold concluded that quite a fair stretch of the road to hell had been paved by the person whom he was about to see.

The door was opened by a woman. Beyond a cobweb line between her cleanish face and quite dirty neck there was nothing to connect her with the “A ROom to let ” lady.

“I saw your notice in the window. What is the rent of the room? ” asked Arnold.

“Half a crown a week in advance.” Her speech was marked with a *diminuendo* and *ritenuto*, beginning with verve and finishing on the verge of dolour. “There

are people like that," thought Arnold. "I suppose her life's story is the same; romance sliding down to indifference.

"Can I see it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, and then, as he was about to take his hat off to enter, she added: "It isn't in here. It's in another house down the street. Could you come in the morning? It's cold out, and I should have to come with you."

"I'd rather fix up from to-night."

"You can't; it hasn't been cleaned out yet. I've meant to do it all day, but I shall get time to-morrow."

"I'll clean it, if you'll let me have the key to look at it."

"I always do clean the rooms out when they are empty, but—if you leave me three and six, that'll be the rent and a shilling on the key—I'll give you the key of the front door, and you need not bring it back if the room suits, as I am busy cleaning. It's the third house from here—that's it. The room at the bottom of the stairs—like that might be."

Arnold made the transaction. "Shall I have a receipt?" he asked, as he took the key.

"You've got the key; that's a receipt," she said drearily.

"Of course it is," said Arnold, trying to work out how it was so as he walked to the house she had pointed out. "Oh, that Crossing-the-Bar voice of hers seems the voice of Bolsover Street. Tell me, what gentlemen and ladies lived in this street when it was young?"

He put the key in the lock of the door of the high, flat-fronted house. He stood upon the doorstep for a few minutes and gazed to where Regent's Park was hidden. The phoenix sunset spread out its wings, wildly fanning the flames to a flare in its extinction. The flare died down to the glow of red embers—the embers to grey ash. He pulled the key from the door and leaned against the area railings for nearly a quarter of an hour, resting, watching the phoenix-dust blow about the sky in stars.

"To-morrow," he said, "it will all be spread out again on the other side, and the brown dawn will rise from it : *phœnix-dust* ! " He raised his hand to his face, touching with thumb and second finger the sudden burning pulse on his cheek-blades.

The lamplighters dallied with their twinkling charges elsewhere ; the street was dark. Window-sashes in flats were raised boldly, and parcels of sweepings and kitchen garbage were flung into the roadway. The paper of one burst open on the kerb near Arnold, and a jagged fruit-tin hopped from it with the stage effect of Harlequin springing, pirouetting, from a property pannier. Arnold had liked the street a few minutes earlier, when the sunset had ransomed it from modernity by flinging gold down to the steps of its old-time doorways. Now, in the gloom, he not so much liked it as turned to it thankfully as a place of refuge.

He entered the house and closed the door. He felt his way along a narrow passage and down the stairs to the basement, until he fingered the door which he sought. The back room was to be his. " Mine," he said, as he pushed open the door and stood within, " mine to live in ; to—— No : live in."

He struck a match and saw a bag of straw, a bottled-beer box, a rag of some material at the window, bottles, and in one bottle a stump of candle.

" Furnished ! "

He lit the candle end. The room was small. In one corner was a hearth without a firegrate ; charred sticks were on it. The side where he had entered was formed by a partition of bare boards to divide it from the staircase. The rag which was fastened to the window had been an underskirt, but was made to serve as a blind by being slit down at the side ; it was of linen, with three flounces of shot silk sewn on. The sack, choked with straw, had served as a bed. " Home ! " said Arnold, sitting down on the box. The door was kicked open, and a thin, harsh-faced woman entered and leered at him.

" Her's soon let it," said the woman.

" When did the other party go out ? " asked Arnold.

“ Her died larst night ; but her went from here last week.”

“ Indeed ? What did she die of ? ”

“ Her was a tart.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ Yes,” said the woman. She pointed to the sacking.
“ You’ll burn that rubbish pretty quick ? ”

“ Who looked after her when she was bad ? ” asked Arnold. “ You ? ”

“ *Me !* ” gasped the woman, writhing her meagre frame in disgust. “ What do you take me for ? Her didn’t see much of me, nor you won’t neither.” She went, slamming the door.

Arnold unfastened his boots ; he pushed the box against the door as the candle spluttered and expired. He went towards the sack in the dark.

“ I should think it’s a fairly quick way, even if it is terrible.”

He was about to drop upon the straw, but he paused. Then he went to the corner by the window and lay upon the boards with his cheek on his arm, and sleep kissed him.

Chapter V

ARNOLD must have lived beyond his means during his first week in Bolsover Street, for when, on the second Monday, again he had paid the rent of his room, he had but sixpence left in his pocket.

Yet he could not recall but one glaring instance of waste. That had been when, longing to rest in his room, he had boarded a bus and asked the conductor, "Where can I go for a penny?" "To the Ritz," the conductor had replied. He could not think of any other money he had wasted.

He went over his expenses of the last week to find the leakage as he walked from his landlady's door to Marylebone Town Hall. That was his first place of call each morning, as the "Situations Vacant" advertisements from various newspapers were fastened to boards on the railings there. He was disconsolate. Even the sixpence in his pocket did not arrest his trepidation.

He had seven shillings and sixpence the week before. Three and six for the key and rent; two and six again for the rent, and sixpence in his pocket, was six and six; how had he frittered away the other shilling? He put the question jocularly to try and cheer himself up a bit: but he replied to it seriously enough.

Monday he bought bread and black pudding; but that came out of the coppers left in his pocket. Tuesday he had found that shop where were sold four commodities and nothing else—stewed eels, soup, mashed potatoes and meat pies. What funny things to run a shop on! The shop was like a schoolroom, with wooden forms and a counter resembling a desk, and the woman who served was not unlike a school-mistress keeping her class in

order. Arnold had a penny basin of soup, and found a piece of meat and a slice of nourishing eel in it. The man to the right had mashed potatoes, which he flooded with vinegar. The man to his left had a meat pie, potatoes, and soup, and altogether must have spent nearly sixpence on the one meal. Well, that was one penny. The same day he had been on the bus ; another penny ; making twopence ; leaving tenpence.

Wednesday ? What happened Wednesday ? Which was Wednesday ? Was it Wednesday he went without or Thursday ? No, it was Wednesday ; he remembered it because he had been shy about having a tip for minding a car. The man pulled up to the kerb and looked round for the men who touted for car-minding. Arnold at that moment paused at the spot, undecided which way to go next. He said, " I'll keep an eye on it for you ; I am having to hang about here for a while." The man accepted the rather offhand offer, and when he returned put his hand in his pocket and coins chinked. Arnold started, and felt himself blush. He had always been absurd about tips. When, as foreman of a job, he had been given money, he had always divided it between the men. But now he started with eagerness and at the prospect of dinner ; whatever was given him should go to one meal—a feast provided by the gods. The man noticed the blush, and with his other hand drew out his cigarette-case and offered it. " I am obliged, sir. Can I drive you anywhere towards the city ? " " No, thank you," said Arnold, taking a cigarette. Arnold had boiled the cigarette in water and drunk the brew, so that he should be sick and not desire food. Wednesday ; still temperance. Er—tenpence, that was.

Thursday he bought a loaf and some cheese. He forgot what these had cost.

Friday ? Friday he had invented his fit-all belt. He took a piece of wire, and, after pulling it round his waist, twisted the two ends together, so that an extra twist would tighten the belt at any time. It was a nice question at first which was the least desirable—the new pain from without or the old persistent pangs from

within. Anyway, it was better than the cigarette water. Friday ; no expenses.

Saturday, half a loaf.

Sunday, half a loaf.

“Of course ! I bought some soap at the beginning of the week. Fool, not to think of it at first, when you know all the time that you want blacking for your boots. You can’t go on turning over the old polish for ever and ever. What the hell’s the good of going to Marylebone Town Hall again ? No jobs in your own trade ! Dozens of qualified applicants for every advert. Every call miles apart. If you start after them again they’ll only leave you somewhere like they left you on Friday. My God, what a journey ! When I die they will find written on my heart, ‘ Eltham.’

“Surely, I am some good to somebody. Why ‘surely’ ? A man who can paint a—— Oh, well !”

He flung round in his step and entered Regent’s Park. The purple, yellow, and white flamelets of crocuses swayed on black earth and green sod as if they flickered through from a buried fire. A scampering squirrel sprang in curves along the path toward him, and, bounding up his coat, thrust his nose into one of his pockets, pushing his hand away to explore. Then it raced over his shoulder to the other pocket, and was convinced with one dip of his nose. “Sorry, old son,” said Arnold. “If I’d a crumb or a crust you should have it, for you are the first living thing to do that for ages—touch my hand.” But the coil of fur and rollicking tail was pouncing up the side of a tree ten feet away. “Come, Click-click, come here, London’s little lover.” The squirrel hung backwards and did something with its paw upon its nose so funnily that Arnold laughed.

The squirrel raced back and began to dig rapidly in the turf beside the path, but it ignored Arnold, as if he were but a tree without nuts or shelter comfort. “Come, Click-click,” entreated Arnold encouragingly. “Very well, enjoy yourself in your own old way. I know what’s the matter with me that makes me friend-proof ; long face, uncongenial companion, gloomy Hamlet——

Click-click, you boulder, don't dig up those crocuses, they look like an outcrop of gold. Click, come and put your muzzle in my hand again. Ah well, let us be cheerful, nuts or no." He began to hum the tune of :

What kind of plaint have I,
Who perish in July?
I might have had to die,
Perchance in June.

"What has become of your beggar's philosophy now?" he suddenly exclaimed. "Went with your ideals when you burnt your pictures, did it? They were nothing special; you'd have done better to stick to still life—two apples, a shell, and a banana. They were no good; waste of paint and canvas. *Your'e a liar!*"

A nursemaid near him grabbed at her young charges and pushed them hurriedly past him. He glanced at her scornfully, but did not lower his voice.

"When you burnt your pictures you must have burnt your philosophy. Must ha' done. Funny; that sounds like 'mustard on.'" He giggled, and, stooping to the path, he prised up a stone and put it in his pocket for no reason. "Must have done; if you'd been struggling, starving, and bearing for the sake of art you would have believed it worth the payment; every farthing, every hour, every turn of the heart-screw. You would have said, 'Some day I shall be great; the touch of the laurel will be antidote for the poison of youth.' Your philosophy would have served and saved you. *Let it serve and save you without art.* I can't. When I destroyed art, I destroyed the core of me. I have now no ambition, no hopes; I have only courage. I will not help death; but I will not hinder it. I will not help madness; but I will not avoid it. If I do want to talk in the street I shall. If I want to shout—no, I shall not shout again, or they will put me away and feed me, and I shall live, and they will give me paints to play with to keep me quiet. They will not be real paints and brushes;

they will be tins of water and a feather, and—I—shall—not—know! Ah, ah! I shall offer my pictures to the man with the string of cockles round his hat who is a king, and I shall not know that I am mad. I shall not shout again. That is a thing to guard against; it makes starvation to the end seem a little thing beside food in plenty and devastation of the brain. When every dread that I could think of has come upon me, and I have looked at it dispassionately, *comes this.*”

He unfastened the collar of his macintosh, which hid soiled linen, and passed his hand across his forehead, which was damp with perspiration.

“I am warm now. I suppose it is the spring getting ready to come. The crocus points are like camel-hair brushes dipped in blue and green and white and chrome. What should I paint with them if I might? I should use board tinted like the sky is now. First I would draw with the pine needles. I would paint a picture of my mother.

“They might hang it in the Birmingstow Art Gallery. They might give a dinner in my honour, the Art Societies of Birmingstow, and as I drank answer to the toast I should know that the touch of laurel is antidote for the cup which is now unto my hand.” Looking among the naked trees he visualised the scene. “I shall say that I am proud to be a citizen of no mean city; that whatever success has come to me I owe it to my native town. She encourages the struggling artist; she cherishes him that he goes not elsewhere, that he may stay and learn the beauty that lies beneath a grim and grimed exterior, to give it back to her in beautiful miniatures, that the world may see her as her lover sees her.

“I shall say—just before I drink their health in compliment return—that I am made strong for art by notice from the local Press; that what has touched my heart most gravely was a notice in the Birmingstow *Daily Mail*, ‘*This picture of the pathetic mother—*’ Bah! I know that if I ever sipped their wine ’twould taste like cigarette-water; that I should know that all the laurel-leaves upon the tree of fame are not worth

a twisted wire. There is not a decoration made in Birmingstow worth picking out of Newn Street gutter."

He flinched as a hand fell upon his shoulder. He realised that he was shouting. He twisted round and faced a uniformed park attendant. "What is it—sunstroke?" asked the official.

"Was I making a fool of myself?" asked Arnold. "I'm in for some theatricals, and I was rehearsing. I thought the park was quiet, nobody about, and I got carried away. I hope I have not been a nuisance."

"What company do you belong to with a moustache?" asked the man dubiously.

"Oh, it's amateur theatricals," said Arnold hastily. "Thanks for pulling me up. I'll finish rehearsal in my digs. Thanks." He backed away as he spoke, and hurried into Marylebone Road.

"I've got to be careful. I've got to be careful," he kept repeating when he had shut himself in his room.

He was glad to have the shelter and haven of the shut room. He had great affection for it. It was bare, but it was now clean. It was lonely; that was its great quality. He could fly to it with rabid eagerness and fling off his domino of indifference as the door closed. He could laugh at fate and life without anyone suspecting or caring what the jest was; could roll on the floor and toss the straw into a summer haycock without fearing a hand at the latch. When it rained he could stand at the window, tracing the trickles on the pane with his finger; or if he came in wet he could burn his bed of straw and dry himself with his clothes around him, then sleep upon the floor for the night, and beg another bed and bits of wood from the packers at the warehouses on the morrow. Yes, he loved the room now that the bugs did not drop from the ceiling.

The walls were stripped and limewashed; even the door and partition were limewashed. His straw was piled in the middle of the floor ready for him to creep into at any time. Upon the hearth was his collection

of jars and tins collected from the parcels thrown through the windows at dusk. His box cupboard-table-chair was there to hold his loaf—when he should buy it. And the door shut out the world.

Never did he feel that he was alone when in this room ; always there was with him here a comforting presence to whom he talked, to whom he prayed each night. “ Send me to sleep quickly to-night ; send me to sleep and let me not wake up again. God, be good to me and let me, let me, let me die. Because I am no use to myself or anybody here, let me not wake ; it is such a little thing to You ; to me it is everything I want.”

Now he leaned panting against the door and repeated, “ I’ve got to be careful. I’ve got to be careful.” Arrows of rain began to break their seeming shafts on the bright shield of his window. “ Perhaps it is as well. I *cannot* go out now, for I cannot spare my bed to make a fire again to-night. It is my unlucky day ; *all the cigarette ends in London will be sodden*—outside the Museum, which is the best place, and the bus stops. And someone will be before me in the dry tube stations. I ought to be able to sleep ; this fearful gnawing kept me awake last night. All the night I long for day to come ; all the day I long for night.”

He knelt on the pallet of straw as Asano kneels on the white mat at the end of the first act of *The Faithful*, which had made a strong impression on him when he had seen it acted. He lifted a straw across his throat as he bowed, and endeavoured to recall John Masefield’s lines, which to his way of thinking were the most cleanly balanced in the English language :

Sometimes, in wintry springs,
Frost, on a midnight breath,
Comes to the cherry flowers
And blasts them in their prime ;
So I, with all my powers
Unused on men or things,
Go down the wind to death,
And know no fruiting-time.

He sank his neck to the straw, the slim, yielding, mocking straw, as Asano sinks his throat to the dirk as the curtain falls in troubled folds.

The varnished straw yielded, and he fell prone upon the heap of his bed. The rims of his eyes tingled with weariness. He made an impotent movement. "I wonder why they don't put weather-cocks on hayricks nowadays like they used to when I was little," he muttered drowsily, and glided to slumber, which mercifully relieved him of another day of his youth.

Chapter VI

ARNOLD began to make efforts to obtain work as a scene-painter. Although these efforts did not accomplish anything, they gave a sufficient fillip to hope to keep him gyrating in the theatres. If he did not actually gyrate, he felt just as giddy on leaving the exits as if he actually had been spun. There was a tantalising similarity of procedure at each hall, suggestive of a hungry ferret's running through a deserted burrow in which still lingered rabbit scents. The usual procedure was for him to be courteously directed from one man to another, from him to another, and on in a circle back to where he started. Each man was kind, sometimes calling him "old man" or "old boy," with often a hand laid on his shoulder while direction was pointed out.

One instance, being a fair example, suffices. He enquired at the stage door of the Royal Theatre.

The commissionaire sent him to the stage door keeper, who was in a little office a few feet away. Here he was told that he must ask for Mr. Rondell, the manager, in front. He went to the front to the box office and was sent to the stalls' bar. He felt certain of finding the manager there. The bar was closed. As each theatre had differently constructed entrails, he had lost himself up passages several times before reaching the bar, and at this stage began to grow giddy.

Near the bar was a door marked "Private." He knocked and knocked—there was the clicking of a typewriter beyond a door—and knocked. A young man answered his assault upon the panel finally, and said that all the scenery for *A Sugar Plum for Rosie* was complete, and that Warren and Bell painted for them.

Arnold asked for their address. The young man went away, and found that it was somewhere at Richmond, but found also that it was not they who had painted the scenery for *A Sugar Plum for Rosie*, and anyway he knew that they would have nothing.

"Well, can I get a job scene-shifting?" asked Arnold, ignoring the man's restlessness to be gone.

"Oh, you must ask at the stage door about that." He made indirect progress through the catacombs to the stage door. The stage door keeper said that he must go to the stage carpenter, and allowed him to go down a black passage which brought him to a flat ceilinged cave, where gilded thrones and dusty gilt cups, fruit-coloured slices of painted temples, blocks of wood, and buckets waited to trip an unwary foot. He fumbled about in this dimly-lit treasure-house of an Egyptian king's tomb which vandals had violated. He was apprehensive of being discovered there and suspected of mischief, but he could not find his way out. He felt dazed, as if the place were full of fog and the ceiling was being gradually lowered upon him. At last, beyond a curtain of rag flowers slung over hooks in torn festoons, he found a man drinking stout from a bottle.

The stage hand said the carpenter would not be back till about six-thirty. But Arnold did not leave the Royal Theatre without hope, for the stage hand had offered him a suck from his bottle, and said that he believed the Carnival Theatre was putting on a new show soon.

Arnold went to the Carnival Theatre, and, after the same spin and roll, found the business manager, who was mildly incensed at the suggestion that a new play was to be put on. He thought the enquiry carried with it a suggestion that his revue, *Don't! I have Fits*, now running was not destined for a long run. *Don't! I have Fits* was only ten performances old.

Arnold went to several other theatres before it was half-past six, when he found the stage carpenter at the Royal Theatre. The stage carpenter did not know anything about anything, or what or where or to whom

Arnold should supply. He was a double blank ; Arnold turned him up and left off playing for the night, as the performances were commencing.

He still had the sixpence in his pocket.

During all the next day he revolved round and through the theatres, and only left off when the orchestras were tuning up, and the musk of pleasure-feeders charged the draught in vestibules and passages with a settled flavour of humanity, perfumed in streaks.

The iced wind fled along the streets of Soho, chasing him to his little room, but he could not sleep for his fourth day hunger.

He rose and lit a little straw in the fireplace. Then he smashed his box and burned it, and, kneeling before the flames, unfastened the unendurable wire from round his stomach. The agony of release from the grip made him swoon, and as he felt premonition of what was about to happen to him he staggered back from the fire.

When he recovered, it was confusing trying to recollect where he was. At first he was alarmed. Before him were wispy flames and but very little smoke ; in his ears was the crackling of twigs and flapping of flames ; to his nostrils the pungency of fire. A flame licked his hand and scorched it. His bed of straw was burning.

He screwed himself into a corner, his knees tucked to his chin. He laughed wildly to see the bits of blaze float off and soar about the room. He felt the fiery morsels settle on his hair and his hands ; he watched their scarlet snowflakes burn out on his clothing ; and he laughed with hysterical pleasure.

The straw burnt out upon the boards. He crawled on to the warm, black bed of it and stretched himself out and prayed more fervently than ever before, that he might sleep, and in his sleep die.

He wondered how long it took for a man to die of starvation, taking into account several previous weeks of semi-starvation. He remembered that a man in Birmingham had been on exhibition for weeks and weeks, charging a penny to be looked at, while he went without food. He wondered if it would end for him

before his rent was due again, and he returned to his desperate demand to die—or even to sleep for a little while.

He did not sleep. He stripped himself and laid himself out, his hands crossed on his breast, so that when they found him they would not have to break any of his limbs to get him into a coffin. Whatever the current of his thoughts, he kept the line of his mouth tranquil, lest anyone from Birmingstow should be needed to see and identify him. He tried to keep his eyes closed and not look at the blackened ceiling; he was afraid of what his dead eyes would tell. But he did not sleep. He did not die.

The dawn began to break. Up the gully of the house walls, from where he lay he could see the sky like a flock of peacocks. The blue and purple sheen of plumage was trailed among the surface sweep of folded wings. A white peacock spread wide the shining silver screen of its tail; spread it, and kept it tremulous, as if he wooed; as if he arched it over to cover his little earth-brown mate with his shining beauty. Now there was nothing but white in the sky; above the horizon, which Arnold could not see, the pale sun must have shown its rim.

“Another day,” whispered Arnold. “O God, pitiless God, another day!”

Stiff and almost frozen, he rose. He had a make-shift bath and shaved himself. Then he dressed. Gradually he began to realise that he was not acutely hungry; that he had “got his second wind.” As in swimming, when a man has surpassed endeavour he feels that he can go on for ever, so now Arnold felt that the dulled ache in his stomach could be borne with fortitude but without anguish. It was wonderful to realise it. He felt weak, but he felt no torment. He felt that he could go on until the end—so long as he touched no food which would break his peace of fast.

Arnold knew that the greatest help to speed a day was given by having an object—something to do, somewhere to go. It mattered not much if there was no

hope at the end of the journey ; it wore the hours away ; and then there was the covert shelter of his room to call him back again with hope of exhaustion and sleep. He dismissed the idea of trying the theatres again. Chelsea sounded alluring.

He did not know where or how far off Chelsea lay, but he asked his way and asked his way until he found someone who knew the direction other than by taking a bus.

Chelsea bewildered him ; it really is not a place to be explored on an empty stomach. He had been in Chelsea some time before he realised that he actually was in Artists' Land. He had stopped in his slow walk to ask a window-cleaner if he was on the right road for Chelsea, and if it was much farther.

" You are in Chelsea," said the man. " Which part do you want ? "

Arnold's thoughts came slow that morning. He looked at the man stupefied, as if it were the moon which he had asked for, and the man had taken up a fork and said, " Which part do you want ? Should you like a bit off the breast ? " He had pictured Chelsea as a patch of quaint song in London's prose of brickery. He had been prepared for Belgian laurels in flame-coloured tubs at doors which were stencilled with dragons and fruit-trees. Chelsea, where the artists live, was a legend of his beliefs. Chelsea as he had imagined it was a theatre where the actors were artists ; the comedy was Life ; the scenes and properties would be duly in keeping. Chelsea, as he had thought it, was where the priests of the temple of art had their offices, which, as such, would show something of the glamour of their goddess. He had expected something as strange as a picking of gilt-on-silver pears in a basket of plaited sleigh-bell ribbons, and now here was nothing other than London shops and London houses. The men, as elsewhere, looked like warehouse clerks ; the girls, as in the other suburbs, were like saucy-lipped milliners. Arnold felt aggrieved ; Chelsea was not Chelsea.

" I want where the artists are," said Arnold. " Where does Chelsea begin and where does it end ? "

"It begins where it ends—in Bedlam," said the window-cleaner, with the stale grin of the man who drives a stock joke forth once more.

"Thank you," said Arnold politely, and turned from the shopping thoroughfare down a road of private houses.

He was crossing a by-road when the thing happened. He turned round swiftly, as if a hand had clutched his shoulder and jerked him round. Somewhere near—very near—him was hot coffee; the hot fragrance went straight to his nostrils and entered his brain. He drew in his breath with a suddenness which made him aware of his jaw squaring in its socket. His intentness was unrewarded; he saw nothing but a glaze of light although he had turned; a spoon-shaped weather-vane whirled in his dizzy brain; the second wind of his fasting was broken!

He found that he was swaying when his sight became steady. Men were digging up the roadway, and a labourer was preparing cans of tea for their dinners. On a pile of rubble at Arnold's feet a can of coffee sent steam into the cold air. Arnold swayed, devouring the perfume with his brain. It maddened him as alcohol. He wanted to snatch it up, scalding still, and drink, or to kick it as far as he could and strike the can-boiler with one of the granite sets.

Once a hospital porter had told him that he never saw a new-born baby but he wanted with savage impulse to thrust his finger down through the hole where a thin skin palpitated on the child's cranium. Arnold's madness of the moment was like that—brain-lust. Yet he was powerless. He swayed above the coffee while it cooled, and he felt life wring the remnant of his youth from him.

A hand came and threaded the can, with others, on a stick and carried them away.

"I have some money—sixpence—in my pocket," said Arnold. "Where is a shop?"

He started with uncertain steps in the direction he had been walking. He came to the embankment and

no shops. He walked along it to the next road, and, turning along it, began to look for one of the little eating-houses which he thought were peppered over every part of inner London. He found none as he crotcheted his way to and fro and along the miles of respectable houses, and came out at last at King Street, where the shops were prosperous and expensive. He wanted something rich with warm gravy and softly firm with vegetables. The coffee had not made him want coffee ; it had painted a picture of a hot meal. He knew precisely which of the sixpenny dinners he wanted—the shredded beef in a hash of vegetables.

There were confectioners' shops in King Street, and in their windows were sugar cakes with silver balls and crystallised violets upon them, pastel coloured fancies in pink and lavender and orange cream, with wavy lines of chocolate and icing about them. He thought what fools there lived to buy such things, buying butter-flies at the price of horses.

There were shops with velvet peaches ; top-knotted and brittle pineapples ; globes of sunshine from Spain ; blue, green, white, yellow, and purple grapes swinging in chains of smilax. It seemed to Arnold that God must have made them solely for their beauty, and not as food, that man might tot up profits in a ledger.

There were stores in which were treasures of the palate in jars and tins and frilled boxes ; spiced and flavoured temptations for the gourmand. " Apparently living is one of the arts also," said Arnold.

" Apparently it is," he repeated, passing an hotel portal where violins were laughing to the diners. " And in that art also I am a failure."

The hotel decided him to leave mocking King Street and cut straight down to the embankment and follow it till he came to some workmen's dining-rooms. The embankment mocked him, though not as King Street had done ; here there was desert and there was harvest. There was no shop so far as he could see. He walked on and on, pricked along by misery.

The changeful façade of house-fronts forced itself

upon his notice intermittently. "I think this place would please me," he said. "When I have eaten I will come back and take it in slowly." He turned his eyes for soothing to the river, where the grey light laved along the silken ripples. Nothing could content him but food. Before him the embankment was deserted as the sea-front of a holiday resort in October. In the distance a bath-chair was being wheeled backwards and forwards an arm's-length, suggesting a mother getting off to sleep a peevish child in its perambulator; in Arnold's immediate vicinity a policeman fiddled with his gloves; no one else was to be seen.

Arnold went to the policeman and asked where something to eat was to be obtained. The constable motioned over his shoulder with a flick of his gloves. Arnold went curiously towards the place indicated and looked in at the windows. In the bay of the first window was a table covered with a plaid cloth, the tartan being of the Cameron clan. A vivid blue plate was on the cloth, and on the plate was half a banana. In a black bowl was a geranium and two peacock's feathers, so placed that the feathers were partly submerged in water and the geranium was high and dry on the edge. A waitress in an Elizabethan dress was moving pensively and moodily about in the background. Arnold felt disturbed. He passed his hand across his eyes and looked again. The things were still there, and, moreover, what he had not noticed before, on a tripod cake-stand was a piece of wedding cake and a pyramid of sliced carrots—at any rate, they looked like slices of carrots.

He looked above the door for a name. An art sign hung out there, stating that the restaurant was "The Crooked Cat" or "The Cooked Cat." He did not peruse it minutely, as the action of holding back his head made it swim even more than the contents of the window had done.

He shifted to the next window, and began to be alarmed for his sanity. Here was not a table, but an upturned tub draped over with a hideous tangerine

cloth. The cloth was laid with an earthenware pitcher crammed with dead twigs of oak-tree, a mother-of-pearl shell levelled up with raspberry preserve, a green and white striped cup in a willow pattern saucer, and a book of poems. He touched the window-glass, felt it to be solid and slippery, so he backed away to the kerb. A girl passed and went into the restaurant. She was next seen seated at the window with the tartan table-cloth. She gazed at the river with a Whistler-stood-here look. Next she took out a little note-book and wrote a little line with a little pencil. She put the book away and motioned to the Elizabethan waitress that she might now be disturbed by attention ; inspiration had had its fling.

Arnold watched agape, wondering what she would eat—the carrot slices, the bit of banana, the piece of wedding cake, the geranium, the feathers, or the whole lot. She was served with a pot of tea and bread and butter.

“ I must be coming round,” said Arnold, as she began to pour plain tea.

He crossed to the menu in a beadwork frame. One item was sufficient : “ Boiled ham and pickled rosebuds (pickled crab-apples).”

“ I spoke too soon,” he said, and went to the next shop.

It was a kind of wooden-china shop ; it exhibited hand-painted toilet sets made of wood in freak shapes and freakish colour patterns. It showed a wood tea-service painted white, and having square dice for handles. Arnold could imagine them selling barber’s pole by the yard or rocking horse by the pound.

The next shop must have been run by a combine. Outside it several showcases were hung. In one of these were examples of glass flowers which could be made to match any scheme of decoration ; there was no mention of why. In another were displayed poems by a young man who undertook to write verses for anyone and for any occasion at shortest notice, birthdays and love-sonnets a speciality. “ Mm ! Tennyson’s

stuff with the words altered," said Arnold, after reading a few lines cut from the "In Memoriam" column of a daily paper. In another was arranged a cardboard room in apprehensive rather than daring colour-scheme by the only woman decorator in the world (according to her business card). Arnold, whose daily work had once been similar, regarded the suggested room with amazement; it looked to be the kind of thing a child paints when the teacher's back is turned.

A fat white cat, with a tiny boa of glycerined ostrich feather round its neck, waddled down the shop steps and chafed its shoulder on Arnold's ankle. He stooped and touched both cat and boa. Yes, they both felt real.

"So this is Chelsea," said Arnold, "or—is it another stage of being hungry?"

The girl who had been letting her soul rip in the restaurant came out and approached him in her walk. He bared his head and stood in her path, holding his hat as if she were a great lady accustomed to giving a sign before men covered again.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am not in the habit of speaking to strangers, but could you tell me—er—are these—I mean to say——"

The girl drew herself up to the full height of a lady in a novelette and regarded him disdainfully.

He continued with a rush. "—these shops look funny to me, as if I am out of sorts a bit. Can you tell me——"

"I noticed you watching me while I was lunching," said the girl, with verve and hauteur. "If you continue to molest me I shall attract the attention of the officer over there."

Arnold put on his hat and moved aside so hurriedly that a shade of disappointment crossed the girl's romantic face. "Impertinence!" she said, combining the syllables with fine attention to stress, but he did not revive the episode with apologies or sneers. She waited as long as the custom of making promiscuous acquaintances commended and then walked on.

"Well, that explains it all," said Arnold to himself. "Doesn't it! She is just a girl with an afternoon off,

come from any part but Chelsea, and she's doing the sights here. Carlyle's house and the rest of the bunch must be close handy, and these shops are catering for sightseers."

With his head upon his breast, forgetful of his quest (for the second wind of hunger was returning), he dragged his feet along the sunshine-swept way of Chelsea shore. His mind was blank. He went as if the back of a hand, knuckled in the nape of his neck, impelled him forward. He kept his eyes turned to the pavement, passing through the Mecca of artists which waited with lure and overplus of charmed associations, dishevelled colour, and grave, fine contours of brick and stone, to win him to worship down its artist's wonder-way. His brain was not nourished, and he walked untouched by its spell.

Chelsea Embankment does not always come to an end ; since artists have fervour, often it stays in patches in the heart. But to Arnold it was without cry, even as Newn Street ; the soul faints also when the body starves. Chelsea Embankment not only came to an end for him ; he did not know that he had left it.

He had forgotten why he had come to Chelsea, if, indeed, there had been a reason, and he had forgotten his quest of a cheap eating-house. As he left the waterfront he passed one such as he had been seeking. He went slowly and lethargically on in the sleep-walk of the destitute who do not beg.

He came to tram-lines in an open space and avoided the car which clashed fussily past him. He stopped in indecision. Some fluttered thought was beating its wings against his mind to be admitted. As he breathed, he drew in the vapour of stewing meats in gravy. He looked around him, and for a moment did not comprehend the place, as a man who has been steadily praying opens his eyes and wonders what the cathedral means and came to be there. He was at the door of a small cook-shop with two steamy windows, and as a customer opened the door he was bathed again in its fulsome aura.

He was roused. Too much misery ceased to be an anodyne. He clipped his fingers on the sixpence in his pocket. "A sixpenny dinner," he said to the waiting woman as he dropped into a seat. "Stew."

Something peculiar was happening to him. He felt his entrails revolting at the smell, the suggestion, the thought of coming food. The woman put down a soup-plate of meat and vegetables protruding from thick grey fluid. She picked up the sixpence and pushed to him a knife and zincky fork and spoon.

Something peculiar was happening to him ; he felt physical nausea loosening his limbs and relaxing his muscles, so that he could not pick up his spoon. Heavy perspiration began to trickle from his cheeks. He felt that he was going to be violently ill. The good, the wholesome food seemed a necessity, yet was horrible to him.

He looked to see if other customers noticed him. The man opposite to him was ladling soup greedily. Arnold looked away, as a man giddy from riding on a roundabout will not gladly look at the roundabout where it spins. "It is the unexpectedness of the pleasure which enervates me," he tried to assure himself, but all the time he knew that it was not so.

"A very hungry man should drink soup first," he said. "I will have the gravy first." He lifted the spoon to his lips, but his palate revolted. He had a second tussle between his will and his physical insurrection. His will won, and he drank the richly flavoured soup.

His courage was fatal. He used up the last fragments of his energy in conquering his nausea as he rose and went quickly out into the street. He walked down the road before him and came to the river. He sat upon a low wall and wondered just what the end would be, the end which seemed welcomely near. He had strained longings to be in his little room with the door closed. Bare cell though it was, its sense of haven was illimitable. But it was too early to be gone there yet ; the bell-rope of the day had to glide through his hands a long way and time before the sundown tolled.

He tried to think of something to pique interest. Here he was in Artists' Land, and the princes of his own country held state near by. It would be good to see them. If he offered himself as a model he might at least see one or two of them—see into their ateliers. His figure was good enough to make the excuse reasonable, but he knew that he could not hold a pose for five minutes in his present state. At least it was something to do, and would kill time; at best he would see the princes, and someone *might* fancy him for the head, or more probably the figure.

When he was revived by the bleak wind he began with the highest, the King of Chelsea. He found the address in the telephone directory. Of the first half-dozen people whom he asked to direct him only the last had heard of Mallord Street, where the artist lived. Beneath a ribbed-tile roof was a straight high wall and an arched door. There was no name or notice to indicate what lay behind—studio, dwelling, or monastery close. He thought it possible that his head might make appeal to the fancy of the King of Chelsea, whose renown lay in painting the metal of which his subjects were made rather than in perpetuating their shape and colour. As Arnold lifted his hand to the knocker of eighty-two he thought it would be rather inspiriting to look for the King of Chelsea's metal while his Artistic Majesty looked for his. The knocker fell without echo.

A stout woman, not trim, opened the door of the ark, or whatever it was eighty-two was meant to suggest. She spoke in syncopation, with relative gestures, as if impatient to be back at her duty. She said that the artist had sufficient models; he did not want any more; he could get as many as he required, and he got them.

"It is not necessary for him to seek models?" suggested Arnold, seeing that she could not think of another form of putting her statement.

"No," she said.

Arnold believed she meant "yes," but he said, "May I see him?"

"He is working, and does not allow anyone to disturb him when engaged on a big picture."

"When can I see him?"

"He might see you at ten in the morning." With fretful fingers she made movements, as if she picked shell from a hard-boiled breakfast egg. "Good afternoon." She was very quick to go.

"Ah, well, the King is worthy of his guard," concluded Arnold. "*He* never spat upon art by burning his pictures; if my city was not worthy of my work, art herself is worth endeavour. I wonder where *he* was born, where he was bred, or what his lessons were." He uncovered his head furtively before he left the step.

He was not sure where to look next. He got into the proximity of more "play-pretty" tea-houses and "tarradiddle" shops. He tried to escape them, only to run into others—"The Blue Canary" and "The Flat-footed Ladies." Cars stopped before them, and silken women rustled up the steps—"So quaint, and so *very* Bohemian. I had the wickedest teeny, teeny slice of peach cake when I brought Mrs. Flanting-Jesswood. And d' y' know, I really think I could paint if I had a few lessons; especially as I have to stay at home rather a great deal while Pom-pom-pom has the mange. Clarice is sitting with him this afternoon, but I know he will fret. Shall you use your new cigarette holder? I——"

"Ough!" groaned Arnold, and crossed to a side-street, where the neighbourhood was more serious and saner. He came later to the schools and the studios near. The first studio that he obtained admission to was a sculptor's. Scaffolding was built round the torso of a huge bust. Men stood on ladders and chipped lustily, as if they recked not if the statue came out as a Venus or an elephant. The Sculptor was not there supervising, but his assistant told Arnold that he could be given an interview on the morrow—"if you are passing. Unless your figure is exceptional you are not likely to be needed, as there is not much work about."

Forty yards away stood the studio of the famous

sculptor, Walter Cate. A young man, smiling to himself with gay-lit eyes, was coming from the door. He checked his pace but not his smile as Arnold spoke to him. "Go straight in," he said. Arnold went through the gateway in the iron railings, and, after hesitating in a little office, reached the big workroom where half-born statues struggled from the throttling stone ; some as if they agonised in the clamp of the marble, others calm and beautiful, as if dream-appointed. A small room was beyond. There a man was working on a statuette not more than ten inches in height. Arnold did not wish to disturb him. He wanted just to stay and look at the marble gods and mortals where he was ; which was like being within the mind of the great sculptor, privy to the half-formed conceptions which stood about in his mentality.

The sculptor glanced up. He frowned at being disturbed, and laid down his chisel with a slight show of irritation. He had a short grey beard and hair powdered like a miller's. His features were of softened ruggedness.

Mr. Cate lost his slight impatience, and was gentlemanly considerate when he knew that his disturber was unfortunate. "The touch of the laurel is the test of inner greatness," thought Arnold, as he saw sympathy take all the marble from the great sculptor's face.

"I am sorry. There is no work being done in the district. What a pity my son is out ; he could have told you where it would be if there was any at all." He kept his glance on the young man's eyes and shook his head again. "I am sorry," he repeated, restoring to the phrase the meaning which politeness has robbed it of.

Arnold flinched ; kindness was like a stiletto to him, so much was it strange. His thanks struggled for expression as did the marble-bound busts around, but he left the workshop without a word.

He went into an avenue of studios and began to knock upon the doors in routine. At No. 1 and No. 2 none answered his knock. At No. 3 a bald and well-fed

artist in a braided morning-suit and white spats growled "Nobody's doing anything." His studio was richly and lavishly furnished; thick carpets made the floor marsh-meadow soft; embroidered hangings took the light into purple corners by many a green and glowing fold; enormous pictures stood on easels among superb furniture, as if a doge of ancient Venice painted in his state-room. The artist went back to his disturbed afternoon nap.

No. 5 was a pretty girl in a flowery studio who did not use models. No. 8 was a man of forty and assurance in a surrounding of new and glistening pictures; apparently he had rented the bare room for an exhibition. "Nobody had anything to do."

Arnold left the avenue and found a series of studios supplied by a passage with one door, in the post of which was a waistcoat button row of bell-pushes. He pressed the top bell and waited. Suddenly the door opened, and he was dazzled. A grim old woman with a mask of paint and powder on her face confronted him. She wore a green and flowered silk dress smothered in sequins and "pretties" and bits of jewellery. She was strung about with yards of varied beads; she wore a toque and a veil and a feather, and looked altogether like a decorated Christmas-tree. She startled Arnold by saying, "I am not at home."

The door slammed, and he was left staring at the vibrating knob. "I suppose that's a woman's way of saying, "Nobody's doing anything," he muttered. Viciously, one by one, he jabbed at all the bells on the post. Then his nerve deserted him, and he ran to the corner of the road and walked hurriedly away.

His pace slackened. It dragged. He went with the heavy, painful weariness of a fly from which the wings have been torn. He longed for the haven of his little whitewashed room. He felt that if the night would only fall he could crawl on his hands and knees in the darkness of by-roads to Bolsover Street. He went on as a nightmare walker. He went on in the curse of a day eternal, in the wilfulness of a day which would not close.

Time had frozen. The world had reversed its spin, and he was walking his way against it.

Seats and doorsteps mocked him, bidding him rest. He feared exhaustion in the street, and longed for the shut door of his room. When first he came to the wall which hides the river he leaned his shoulder to it as he went on, and felt glad of it and the lonely, wide road.

But the wall had no break ; it went on and on. The road led nowhere ; it went on and on. They were adjuncts to the curse of perpetual daylight. Once, when no one was in sight, he leaned his back to the wall, his hands stretched out as on a cross. He felt that his legs were crumpling up beneath him, that his hands were slipping and his shoulders were sliding down the bricks—or was the wall gliding upward like a wave to curl over him ? The pavement was swaying. Thank God night was falling ! The sky was growing dark. *No !* It was not coming dusk, he was going to faint. Not here ! Not here, but in his room ! And now he felt satisfied that the end would come before his rent fell due.

The despair gave him courage, gave him hope, which till then had been like a frightened rabbit, peeping at intervals of scared necessity from the mouth of its burrow to see if it could get, despite the watching fox, a little of the green food growing all round.

He gripped upon the brickwork, he fought back the darkness ; he mobilised every red drop of his blood and willed it to serve him. He stood away from the brickwork without falling and faced towards his destination, the whitewashed shrine where he could die in peace ; without a name, without fearing that a single word or accent of his should betray from whence he came or what he might have been.

Oh, the endless wall ever beside him as he staggered drunkenly on ! The wall went on, went on ; it seemed to encompass the earth. Sometimes it appeared to swing past him, as if he went by it on a bumping sledge ; sometimes it grew vague and distant even while his hands were touching it. Sometimes it ended but only for a gateway, and again it went on and on and on——

Bolsover Street ! He reached it, and still it was not quite dark. He clung to anything which he touched during the last weary stages of his journey. He was blind with weariness when he touched his door. He fumbled with the key and obtained entrance, and lowered himself from stair to stair. The door of his sanctuary was but a yard from him, and he was reeling. For terrible minutes he dared not loose the newel post. The door in sight, he could not reach it. He bowed about the post, and fought and craved for strength to cross the narrow passage.

The door above slammed ; the woman who was his neighbour was coming down the stairs. Despair, his master, loosened his finger grip.

Fool that he was ! He had but to fall toward the door, and by his fall he would enter his room. He lurched. He was within the room, and the door was closing—— He raised his hands in thanks to God as he crashed.

Chapter VII

“It was because His mother was deserted by His father that Jesus Christ was born in a stable—a love Child.”

Arnold quickened from his lethargy, astounded by hearing a voice proclaim this with conviction. He was huddled, at less than full stature, for warmth among the packed crowd who listened, yawning, to the vain orators in Hyde Park. A plain-clothes policeman shut off the cold on his right side ; a man in a fleecy coat was on his left ; the people in front were sufficiently tall to break the advance of chill ; he did not know what manner of men were behind, but it did not matter—there was no wind from that direction. The group in which he stood was round a violent-minded Socialist orator in little, but Arnold had not been listening ; he had been watching faces as they turned their contours in ennui.

He had been seeking to discover what these men had in common that they should be drawn together, making so varied a crowd. Few were interested in the speakers ; most of them were without companions. They were of no one grade of society ; there were men who were possibly beggars, there were men who probably were wealthy. They drifted as if they were ever about to pause, or paused as if they were ever about to drift again. He found what the lure was when he asked what had sent himself there on so bitter a night. Loneliness ! He had been questing companionship, to be encircled by human beings even if they were strangers ; to hear a voice which could be taken as addressing him. What was said mattered not so long as the speech was directed toward him.

That was the common instinct in all these men—the

effort to turn the head away from inward loneliness. The brooding fat man, who looked as if he doted on whipped cream—he was lonely. The gloomy, black-whiskered man, who looked as if his hobby was cutting up dead children—he was lonely. The man with—oh, but then, they all were lonely. Among his brothers standing there he could feel the imploring yearning of their friendlessness. Their very reserve was a gesture which betrayed their inducible isolation.

Arnold looked at his brothers, and wondered if in any other city were spilled so many lonely men as roll into the lap of London. There were scattered among the lapful of threaded necklaces, beads of every sort; exquisite beads many of them, perfectly cut and polished and bored; flawless; some of them finer than any that were stringed; but *they did not match*.

“She was deserted by the father of Jesus.” Arnold made a movement from among the men he stood with and succeeded in working his way among the audience of the woman who had arrested his attention. “She was deserted, like I am deserted by my husband. She was without a home, the same as I am without a home. I am too old to be the mother of a child like she was at that time—I am sixty-three—but I am a mother and a grandmother. I love Christ; He was a genius. He had a great intellect. He was a great teacher. He was no more the son of a god than I am the daughter of a god.”

A man in front of Arnold laughed and moved away, so that he could see the speaker without anyone between. Her voice rose in vehemence. “I am here because men are neglecting their duties. I am a woman, and it is men’s duty to protect us and find shelter for us. I have no shelter. I am starving.”

This was the first time that Arnold had heard anyone say, “I am starving,” and he thought how utterly foolish the word sounded. He himself was starving, and yet the words meant nothing. He knew the dictionary meaning of them; he knew what it was to starve; but the words as words were as meaningless as a phrase

which one has repeated so many times in succession that it is merely a sequence of vowel and consonant sounds.

"I am starving. I have no shelter. I have a friend ; she is a poor woman, but she gives me 'a lie down.' I have no pamphlets to sell, and if I had, this is a Royal park, and I could not offer them. If I had them, none of you men would have courage enough to follow me outside the gate and buy them or give me sixpence."

Arnold narrowed his eyes as he probed the quality of this. Was this the shrew ; was it the woman who thinks she knows men, telling them they dare not do a thing to get it done ? Was it not rather an astute starving woman avoiding the restrictions of the park ?

The woman was continuing. "I can stop no longer. I came down to put the case of that poor woman before you and ask you to do something to relieve her distress. I promised her I would, and I am too weak to do more now that I have done it. *I am starving.*"

Her audience made way for her to pass. The emptiness of language was puzzling to Arnold. Her last sentence had been spoken with all the graphic force of truth, and nobody knew what she meant ; not even Arnold, and he was starving at that moment. Custom and the habit of meals which had brought the woman's audience to, and in cases past, their individual prime, allowed them to sum up without definite thought. "Yes, she is starving ; but people do not really starve nowadays. Let her say that she 'can play upon a comet as if it were a banjo' and I should understand what she was trying to say in metaphor, but tell me she is starving and immediately I wonder what she had for breakfast. 'Starveling' she possibly meant. To starve is to die ; she is not dead. I myself sometimes say 'I am starving' when the waiter hangs back with the third or fourth course. Starving ! What is starving ?"

The woman, erect, walked away, not loitering as one who permitted almoners. A girl of twenty stopped her to speak. Gilded feathers of hair stuck out from the girl's tam-o'-shanter ; her dress was London-smart—

good copy of a bad copy of an actress's clothes—but her clothes were in eruption of disorder owing to a ruckled scarf. Yet she took off her gloves to shake hands with the woman as they parted.

The woman was passing through the gate. Arnold had difficulty in catching up with her. As soon as she detected that she was being followed she began to cross the road. He raised his hat and called to her.

“Madam, may I speak to you for a moment?”

“Certainly,” she said, delaying.

He was not good at dispensing charity; he blurted out, rather than said, “Madam, I am almost as poor as you are, but if you will take this I should be pleased.” He pulled out a small coin from his pocket, and they both looked at it.

It was a farthing.

He blushed furiously. “I am sorry,” he said. “I thought it was a sixpence.” He fetched up the silver coin and offered it.

“I cannot take it; you say you are as poor as I am. I have just been given threepence and I shall have more. When I have rested I am going to speak again to get relief for Mrs.——”

“I cannot help anyone else, and only you because you say you are starving.”

“Wait a minute. You heard me speaking about her or——”

“No,” he said. “I only came near when you said you were starving.”

“Then you don't know what I am. I am an atheist, and, more than that, I am an anarchist. I do not believe in banks. I do not believe in——”

“I don't care what you are except that you are a person starving.” The repetition of the word took away its last vestige of meaning, making it quite inane, as if to say it properly one should have straws in one's hair.

“I cannot take it; you are as I am.”

“Almost, I said,” argued Arnold. Under this provocation he felt like throwing the coin in the gutter.

"Listen. If you speak the truth and understand the ethics of starvation you know that after the first days, inertia and indifference descend upon you, not to be disturbed unless you see someone eating or smell food, unless you pass a shop where they sell what you are wanting. I have got to that stage. I stick to up and down Marylebone Road, which is without shops, when I want new air. I came here down side-streets, and did not look as I crossed where the shops are. If I buy a loaf with this money and break my fast I shall have to live the worst days all over again to no purpose. I do not think I could bear it twice."

"I understand."

"If a miracle happens and I live till my work comes round; if I live to be even affluent, able to afford to pack a house from cellar to garret with food, always—always—always there will be flashing about in my soul terror lest I have to live again through the first stages of starvation. Take this money and rid me of temptation. See, this morning I had to get money for rent. I sold my coat and vest, but it was not enough, for they were very worn; I had to let my linen go, and there was sixpence too much—this sixpence. There is a seat if you wish to rest, but take the money first. May I sit beside you?"

She made room for him. She held the coin betwixt her thumb and finger. She stared before her in silent thought or reverie.

"What shall you do at the end of the week?" She asked at length.

"Nothing, I hope."

She looked at the sixpence. "You are starving and so am I, but I am a woman and I am old."

"Yes, and I am a man and I am young; therefore my appetites are stronger, and hunger is more acute."

"Yes, that is true. But this is your first time, whereas I have often starved."

"The competition," thought Arnold. He said, "Yes. This is my first experience; therefore doubly, trebly hard to me. The old soldier can laugh more

easily when wounded than the boy stricken in his first fight."

"When your work comes round, you say, you can live again. I have no such hope."

"Even if I am here then—even if it came to-morrow and I had tools—I should not have energy to work. I have only one hope, and that is in having no hope."

"There are thousands of the workers starving in London."

"You are a propagandist, and peel the meaning off words. If there were as many as one thousand men without ideals who were starving—I mean *starving*—in London, do you think they would let London stand? If I had never had ideals, do you think that I should let that man walk unmolested past me?" He flung his hand towards a man, fat and gross, a Jew in furs who was passing. "Why should I let him get home to supper? I have nothing to lose and I do not want to live; why should I not bite out his throat with my teeth and feel his cosseted blood spurt on to my frozen body——"

The anarchist woman interrupted with a quiet, "I repeat that there are thousands of the workers starving."

"If they are, what comparison is there? The workers, phlegmatic, physical-feeling people only. To me the physical is but a tithe of the suffering, the tithe I pay to God in return for having accepted my life from Him; the physical I can master. I am an artist, so I suffer more—am handicapped. If it were not for being such, I could help starvation to its close. What is to prevent me welcoming into my heart the frost?"

He wrenched open his macintosh and let the wind cavort on his breast. She did not look at him. She had previously noted how the covering sagged and stretched against him as he walked, and knew that he was almost naked beneath.

"You're an artist," she said. "Perhaps I can help you. I do a lot of social work, and I'm arranging to meet a man to-morrow night who has influence. I'm

trying to fix for him to look at the pictures of a young man who is struggling up. I'll mention you also if you will give me your address."

"Do you make *arrangements for to-morrows?*" exclaimed Arnold. "Still I will give you my address; but when I said I was an artist I meant in the emotional sense. Certainly I can sketch, but I have given up all thought of art; I jilted her before she had the chance to jilt me."

He took from an outer pocket an old letter. It happened to be one of Bennetta Sard's, but the fact did not disconcert him as he looked over it to find a bare space big enough to write his name and address on. He tore the corner off and put it with the sixpence between the woman's fingers.

She said, "Don't talk to me for a while; I have to straighten something out."

He left her to her thoughts.

After a time she spoke, and rose to confront him while she was speaking. "You can sketch. You have thought yourself into bewilderment. I have been thinking for you. Rest all to-morrow till night—rest every day till night."

"Every day!" said Arnold disparagingly.

"Don't exhaust your energies in tramping about. Get it into your head that you are going to fight—Don't start interrupting me again. I know all about it. I know you have no weapons. All the same, you've got to win." She put the sixpence on the bench, but retained the corner of paper. He shook his head and smiled. She took no notice, but continued. "Don't buy anything to eat with that; it's the capital to start you in business. To-morrow night buy a paper pad and a pencil and begin——"

Arnold laughed mirthlessly.

"Begin," she said evenly. "Go into saloon bars and draw the customers; draw anything, but make them pay. You won't be begging if you can sketch at all."

She walked away without looking back. He picked up the coin and dropped it into his pocket. Life was

no less miserable for him by reason of the hope indicated in the woman's scheme. Like a python with its tail in its mouth, squirming slowly in unbroken oval, writhed round but one idea ; he had reached the point where starvation would soon bring death ; to begin to struggle for continuance of life now was probably to win his way back to no further than the point where he could feel again the intensest agony of new hunger ; was it worth it ? Was it worth using the last shreds of effort to disturb this coma, merely to feel with quivering rawness the prolonged operation of a new spell of privation ? Even the courage to live, the stamina of effort, was sapped away.

But all the time, enclosed in the surround of his slow, revolving thought, there was squeaking hope, like a rabbit in the cleft of a stick—a meal stuck up in the middle of the circle made by the python which gnawed upon itself.

As he made his circumspect way to Bolsover Street his thought rippled outward, but never the circle broke.

The blue altar cloth of night was draped over the block of houses in which he lived ; the street lamps at the corners and before it shone like offertory candles. The lamp of the moon, which was kept always burning, was hung above ; the star-painted reredos of sky was extended above the altar. The place was holy with refuge to Arnold as he came in grateful sight of it. He would not begin the struggle again. If he did he might lose even this.

“Sanctuary,” he said as he clutched the knocker to support himself while he found his key.

He was glad that he lived in the basement ; it would have been so much more hopeless had he had to crawl upstairs instead of creep down. He gave a great sigh of accomplishment as he leaned against the door within his room. Always on entering he felt as if he had been pursued, and had slammed the door in the baying mouths of the pack. He slipped as he moved from the door. He had fallen upon one knee, and he faced suddenly round,

partly retaining the posture. It seemed that someone had thrust against the door from the outside and flung him forward.

His attitude was that of a gladiator preparing for an upward jab under the net of his opponent. He bared back his lips about his teeth. Who had a right to force an entrance here? This was a thing which broken youth *could* fight—something tangible ; something that a man could see and strike at.

The door shook in its length and began to open. He gathered himself to leap upon the intruder. Slowly the door swung open, as if a light breeze pressed it. It swung open to the full. Beyond, in the passage, there was—nothing ! Gloom and the stripes of the banisters, but no real thing, nothing *tangible* ; as ever, nothing that a man could grip and struggle with.

It mattered not ; he had been roused from meek acceptance of his fate. He went into the passage and felt about in the gloom. “ I must have started the door open with a jerk as I left it,” he said. He came back into the room and put a brick (kept for the purpose) against the door, and, crossing to the window, looked up the gully of walls at the star-patch to be seen.

“ I *will* live ! ” he said, hissing it against the glass as if it were a curse against himself. Perhaps it was.

Perhaps it was. He believed that it was on the morrow, when he strode to and from a corner in Chancery Lane. “ The Palfrey and Ball ” sent out its warm and spirity breath from the corner. It was the door of the saloon bar which alternately attracted and repelled him. In the secrecy of his macintosh pocket he clutched the sketching-pad. Ten times he walked to the door, put his fingers upon the handle ; ten times he hurried away from it. Each time that he was routed by sensitiveness his indecision and alarm increased.

Each time that he turned to coax himself to the ordeal anew he had to argue with himself more and more deliberately. He returned to the attack again ; again he felt to see if his macintosh was thoroughly buttoned ; again he looked at the clock in the formidable bar to see

if it was too early yet or too late to begin this night. It was eight o'clock—the time he had decided on. Again he looked critically at “The Palfrey and Ball” to see if he had chosen a good starting-place, in hope of excuse that it was too humble or too lavish for his purpose. He would have to abide by his choice, he had been since six o'clock making it. He held out his hand to see if it was steady enough to control lines. His hand shook. It would have to be to-night; to-morrow he would be unable to hold the pencil. His hand was upon the door; he was pushing it inward; he was standing at the counter, and could hear his own voice as over a telephone.

“Good evening.”

Anticipating an order, the lady coquetting behind the bar responded “Good evening,” preserving in the ordinary phrase its tang of welcome, so gracious was her business smile. She was amply built and had twirls of black, well-kept hair flattened to her forehead. She looked as if she had never missed a second helping of pudding in her life. Arnold would have preferred to make his first plea to someone who had suffered so that even her smile was sad; so might she be moved to let him stay and use her premises. He flung himself upon the mercy of the plump.

“Do you mind my asking these gentlemen if I may draw caricatures or portraits of them?”

“I don't mind if they'll let you,” she said, retaining her rippled smile. The kindness of this reply reduced her avoirdupois in Arnold's estimation to something less than what he would have first held it to be—fat. She was not really bad-looking; rather comely, in fact, since she continued to smile. One had to admit that she was plump, but no more than pleasantly so. Her dress was cut low, but then, her bosom was white, and the room was warm—luxuriously warm. The warmth sent the blood shooting through him like rockets, tingling and showering. He had not contemplated this asset of his enterprise; the warmth—warmth for his limbs and warmth to his spirit by fellowship with human kind, however superficial that fellowship was.

Arnold pulled out his pad and looked eagerly to the tall man with a Duke of Wellington face who had been jesting with the lady. "May I draw a portrait or a caricature of you?" he asked.

"Certainly," said the man, not turning from pouring water into whisky. "A caricature—not a portrait at any price."

"I charge threepence each," said Arnold apprehensively. The man went on talking and laughing with his friends. The moment Arnold's pencil touched paper he lost all his nervousness; he was decanting his stored art. His model was ideal. Had Arnold sought through curiosity crowded London, he would have found none other to so please his vein; a small head, with every feature finely shaped, but much too large for so slight a head. The man was at least six feet five inches in height, and wore a high hat.

The man gave a swift glance at Arnold, intentional in its direction; not at his face, not at the sketch, but at the front of the macintosh. Arnold started, and his pencil stuck. He was suddenly struck with stage-fright. His fingers stiffened, so that they felt like a packet of nuts and bolts. "He must have watched me come in," he thought. "My macintosh must be hanging peculiarly despite the newspapers packed round me to stop it flapping." The man lifted his glance to meet the glance of the younger man, smiling as he did so.

So long it was since anyone had smiled at Arnold that the kindness was a caress. "You lend yourself to caricature," he said, attempting to retrieve his ease.

"I know, with a nose like this," was the reply. "Don't be kind to it; I want a caricature." Arnold was not kind to it. The lead rode over the pad with a few more purring glides and the caricature was submitted.

"People do not know what their profiles look like; show it your friends and ask them," said Arnold, who was satisfied with the sketch.

"I do know what my side-face looks like," said the man, sliding his fingers down the cord to his pince-nez. "I dress by a three-mirrored cheval."

"If you are satisfied with it I will sign it. I only take payment for what I sign."

"Sign it." The man dropped the glasses from his nose.

"What will you drink?" said the man, holding out his cigarette case as Arnold whisked a brief signature across the paper. This was rather disturbing to the caricaturist, who was afraid that liquor might play havoc with him owing to his fast. He feared to annoy the obliging proprietress by refusing.

"A bitter," he said.

There were eight or nine men in the room, all apparently successful and intellectual men, and they were friends. The caricature was provoking mirth and badinage, and several wished to possess it. As Arnold raised his glass he realised that his worst fear (exhorting clients) had no foundation; he had but to finish his first sketch of a night in a good-class saloon and more would be wanted.

The friends arranged among themselves who next should be drawn. A jovial, rotund man was selected, and showed inclination to sit still for Arnold's benefit. Arnold begged him not to, and moved about, keeping to the angle he wanted.

"Do you mind if I indicate the gloss on your nose?" he asked.

"Warts and all," said several, as if by preconcerted signal.

"Warts only, as it's a caricature," said the man under the pencil. This was what Arnold wanted; he could have sung.

"You enjoy doing these, don't you?" said one of the laughing company.

"Love it," said Arnold, who was happy. "Why, do I show it?"

"You do a bit."

Arnold laughed. He was very happy. Was it the warmth of the room, the kindness of his clients, excitement, or the feel of a pencil long estranged from his fingers? Possibly it was the combination which delighted him. He heard the music of his blood. The

men were talking to him, and he was answering. He ripped off the drawing and offered it. As he was signing it he heard the man calling for a drink for him. "Please, no," he exclaimed.

"You must," said the man. "Oh, and a good cigar."

"Please, please no," said Arnold. "I cannot draw when I am 'creamy,' and I must finish my night."

"You must."

"Oh, well," said Arnold, who was also afraid of them finding out that when he was drunk his pencil had magic, requiring only that it should be held before it portrayed in startling comparison the incongruities such as are side by side in every face. "Oh, well," he said; touched the glass with his lips, and set it aside.

He was about to commence his next drawing when the man (forty, handsome save for a wryness of his smile, blue-jowled, door-knobs on his forehead) reached and ran his palm over Arnold's knee. "You are doing this for fun," he said.

"No," said Arnold, "I'm doing it to get some money."

The man laughed. "That settles it; you are doing it for a wager."

"No, really no."

"You are doing it to get types. You memorise."

"I could memorise, but I shall not. I am doing it for a living."

"You are——"

Arnold handed him his caricature. "Shall I sign it?"

"If you will have a drink with me."

"I will have a cigarette instead. If you don't mind."

"Then you will have a drink when you have finished for the night? Have you ever been in saloons doing this before?"

"No. How can you tell?"

"You have called no one 'sir.'"

"Shall I sign it, sir?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Yes, but you'll have to have a big drink when you are through. Here's a match."

"Pleasure."

No money had passed as yet ; he might, for any sign of condescension, have been entertaining personal and educated friends. It was all so different from what he had anticipated. Yet they must know, they must know that he was destitute ; they must know, however careful he had been in shaving and trimming his hair ; however new his macintosh looked and whatever shine was on his boots. Once he stopped and regarded himself in a bevelled mirror. His cheeks were bright, and he looked gay and debonair ; his dress did not betray him. In the mirror he met the tall man's gaze. The gaze had curiosity, and told him that none of them knew what he was ; he was a mystery to even the tall man who knew that his macintosh fell in unusual folds.

Arnold did not proceed without one failure. The manager was fetched from another part of the bar that he might be drawn. Arnold bungled from the first line of him he drew. There was no hint of likeness, or contortion of likeness. The tall man tore the sheet from the pad and told Arnold not to disgrace himself.

"I see the compliment in that," said Arnold to himself. Returning to depicting, he gave himself and the company satisfaction. A glass of hot whisky was set before him. He had but one more customer to draw, therefore he drank. He felt that this was his last safe drink, especially as he was "mixing." If he would be allowed to stop at this his joy was perfect. About him was the golden haze in which one seems to walk in distances ; the floor was not hard ; indeed, was scarcely firm to walk on ; he and all his neighbours progressed a little way away from the floor ; without actually floating they progressed unhindered. When men spoke their voices came vibrating along silver strings, and life was muted to existence in a pleasing dream. He hoped that no one would insist on him having another drink, which would take him out of the "creamy" state to "half-seas-over."

He sat down to draw the last man, sat at a table with an old gentleman who was telling him an incident which befell him because he was King Edward's double.

A client of his had rushed up and shaken hands with His Majesty on Edinburgh station, thinking it was he, and the King had said——

Arnold listened to this while he looked hard at the man he was to draw. He was trying to decide if he was not already far from sober. However intently he looked, the man's face was all out of focus ; the nose looked as if it had been Roman before someone had walked about on it ; the eyes were valiant, but were set so ruggedly that they watched the world through a wooden mask. Could it be owing to mixing whisky and bitter ? The outline did not quiver—not much. Finally he set down the outline, as it came to him through the mist, because it always came the same. He did not dare to caricature it further. Battered as it was, he liked the face. He pulled the paper from the pad, hesitating about submitting it, but when it was handed round everyone wanted it.

“ You can say,” said the man with the face which Arnold could not believe, “ that you have drawn a champion boxer. I won the eleven stone open championship in nineteen-o ” (that was the year which Arnold found scribbled on his pad next morning).

“ You can say,” said first one and then another, “ that you have drawn——” Down the silver strings vibrated the names of lawyers, one author, and King Edward's double ; but Arnold forgot the first syllable of each name before the last was ended. They put tankards and glasses to his hand and held cigarettes for him to take. The tall man paid double the full fees of the evening. Arnold could not be churlish and refuse goodwill ; he drank, and the golden haze filled with a splendour of butterfly wings which fanned about him where he sat.

“ Time, gentlemen, please.” He was saved from exhibiting his incompetence to accept without folly their generosity. The hours had passed fleetingly as a bare quarter, and it was time to close the door. They shook hands with him. The adventure was ended—not ended quite ; *to-morrow he would dine.*

Chapter VIII

HAVING overcome his diffidence on his first night in saloon bars, Arnold thought that he had conquered it for good, or so long as he should need to continue in such means of livelihood. He was wrong. Upon the second night he determined to commence at seven o'clock ; yet not before an hour later than that could he decide on his starting-point. "The Golden Cup," in a lane off Fleet Street, showed promise of reward if he could only force himself to enter. Again and again he approached the entrance and retreated.

He asked himself continually what was his dread. Beggary? No ; he gave good value for money. Pride? He had no right to pride ; in his blood was a legion of paupers. Prostitution of art? He did not consider honest work as such. Falling away from his ideals? Rather he reached toward his one remnant of an ideal—to dine from a table with a white cloth upon it.

At "The Palfrey and Ball" they had been good to him ; did he fear an anticlimax? Was he afraid of slight? A little twitch of anger flicked him at thought of being slighted. He was in the vestibule of the saloon bar now. A heavy curtain served in lieu of doors. He swung into its folds, and, pushing them from him, entered as if to meet a threatening spectre. A tinkling clock sprinkled the notes of the half-hour chime about the room as he entered.

The room was evidently the preserve of a small gathering of journalists. A row of them was huddled close to the counter sweeping from one corner in the curve of a pruning-knife. Each head turned ; a friend was anticipated, or one who would stand drinks. Arnold raised his hat and asked permission to sketch.

"I'm afraid no one here has much money," replied the proprietor.

A big man (slumbrous eyes, grizzled gold moustache, pit of a dimple in his chin) said, in a voice plaited with Irish vowels, "'Try the 'Lamb and Fool.' I believe there are some gentlemen there who have some money."

"Are you sarcastic?" asked Arnold sternly. The man had spoken laughingly, but without trace of sarcasm. There was no reason why Arnold should have so replied, but that was what he did say.

"No, no. No, old man. I think it would be a good pitch for you."

"Where is the 'Lamb and Fool'?"

"Lower down on the same side."

"Thank you."

"Good luck."

Arnold went to the house of cheer lower down the lane. The saloon bar was at the end of a garishly tiled passage. He entered hurriedly. There were many people in the room, and he thought of retreating, but held his way to the counter and obtained the permission which he sought.

A circle of jesting men were spread and clustered at a ring of tables. They were men in their thirties, and a pretty woman was perched upon a high stool. She was amusing them with an impersonation of one of their number who was fuddled. It was a very clean group, and Arnold addressed them collectively. A moment's quiet; the quiet of good-looking men shy of exhibiting what interest they might have in their appearance. The pretty girl regarded Arnold with a child's stare which reminded him plaintively of Bennetta Sard. No one answered. He felt very concerned at having checked their mirth.

"It will be a caricature. I will not make anyone good-looking," said Arnold, steadfastly clinging to his intent. Having at one time had good looks, he knew that it made a man constrained from showing interest in portraiture. He looked down at the youngest and handsomest, who was looking upward past straight

brows at him. Their gaze travelled along the same bore, and was seriously intent. The silence obtained. Arnold did not know how to withdraw.

"Don't draw mine," said the young man, as one who craves a boon. "Have a drink instead."

"I would rather earn some money. I shan't want anyone to stop still. I get more life into it if you are vivacious again."

"Don't draw me," said the young man, lowering his eyelids.

"Thank you," said Arnold lamely, and put his pad in his pocket. He bit the surface of his lip. The others were watching him, looking full in his face; he could not for the moment think how to get away. He was up against the virtues—modesty, kindness, and the graciousness of part refinement. About to retire, he raised his hat to the pretty girl. She was the wife of one of the men. Her glass contained dark wine. So much Arnold gathered before she instantly smiled.

"Draw Val," she said. "Draw Val," Val was the man who was fuddled. A laughing cry of agreement came from the group. Friends tilted the man's hat and fixed the spears of his waxed moustache—one point up, one point down. It required only a few Phil May strokes to limn him as a dissolute toper. There was a shout of exultation as the paper was laid on the table.

The youngest man pulled Arnold's sleeve, saying, "I'll get you plenty of customers. Wait quietly; you shall draw everybody. Pull a chair in here where you can see everybody. Have whisky to inspire you? Good. Draw the lady while your drink is coming. And put underneath 'Our Maimie.'"

Val's picture came back to have a motto under-scribed. The crowd was busy in inventing captions. The words he wrote beneath the portraits were merrily explained to the artist, so that he was entertained with anecdotes from the time he sat down, and he abandoned himself to their young and energetic joyousness, and laughed, and was careless with the hour in its merriment,

and at that he was richer in content and assurance as well as coin when the doors closed.

Yet when the morrow evening came he was loath, as before, to enter the saloon bars.

He felt ill and weak—crushingly ill and pitifully weak. He leaned against the brass rail which was before a bar window and felt acutest misery. The wind whimpered through a tree which grew on the kerb, with its branches brushed up against the night sky. In a flat near, someone was practising upon a piano, playing over and over the second phrase of “Valse Triste.” The shuddery music was horrible to him, as if he was helpless, hearing someone struggle for breath. A swift rain began to beat on the street, and he stepped into the doorway.

There was warmth and the comfort of activity for him in the bar ; he pushed open the door and approached the barmaid. He had to repeat his question several times before she comprehended his wish. She told him to ask the manager, who was drinking with his friends, but she did not indicate which was he.

Arnold felt that it was folly to proceed, as he felt so ill, but he crossed to the main group and asked for the manager. He had to ask several times before being directed.

“Speak up,” said the manager, scowling. “What do you want me for?”

Again Arnold requested to be allowed to draw the patrons of the house.

“Well, but be quick then. There’s not much money about, and we don’t run this as an office for everybody’s trade. Better come nearer the end of the week.”

“Very good, thank you.” Arnold went into the street, and the rain rushed upon him. There was a saloon opposite. He crossed to it and entered. As soon as he was past the door a man with matches proffered his wares, and then one with bootlaces. At the next step an old woman, with painfully neat cloak and bonnet, whined to him that her three sons had been killed that week in a pit disaster, and she extended her

hand, as if she had done all that was necessary to obtain alms. A banjo spluttered its notes at the doorway, and two men began to sing a duet, asking what would happen

If those little baby fingers,
Pressed against the window-pane,
Should be cold and stiff to-morrow,
Never trouble us again.
If the blue eyes of our darling——

Arnold realised that he was not in the type of house in which his talent would be appreciated. The men in the rain, who in song requested all and sundry to “gather up the sunbeams lying all around our path, let us gather wheat and roses, flinging out the thorns and chaff,” they were the unfortunates who had need of the spare coin in this class of bar, and he had no right to deprive them of it when he could get it in places where they would not be welcomed. This place was all malformed sound, and glaring light, and humid with peculiar smells; it made his head swim. Someone laid a hand upon his arm. It was a garish woman who stank of violets.

“I am no good to you,” he said, shaking his head. “I am hard up.”

“You get into the air; you ain’t well,” said the woman. “Have you come in for a drop of brandy to put you right?”

“No. Which is the door? I am dizzy. Get me outside.” He felt that she, or someone slight, was supporting him. “Please,” he said, after a pause.

The street singers were screaming sentiment near his ear; he was passing them. The rain was hissing on his macintosh; he was in the street. He was stumbling; the woman had left him. He lifted up his face to delicious cold rain, and the earth was heaving up and down with rhythm beneath his feet. The walls were falling from him and falling to him; only one thing was continual—the sweet smite of the flashing drops.

He took off his hat and opened his macintosh to get

more of the rain. In the rain was salvation. What was slipping from him? It was only the paper packing which he had disturbed. Somewhere near him a woman or a shrill animal shrieked with laughter, and a man's voice said disgustedly, "Drunk. Pawned his shirt to get it." But the rain, the blissful rain, persisted. It trickled and flowed lambently about his breast. It would be his deliverer. It would bring him sufficient presence of mind to get him back to his sanctuary in Bolsover Street—the blessed rain, the blessed rain which washed him and riveted the giddy earth.

He was almost his normal self soon, but he was not sure of his direction. By the time he reached his whitewashed room it had never seemed so precious, so inviolate. In the gloom, its ghost-walls showed guardian as those of a sepulchre ; in its stillness there was solace ; in its entrenchment, by reason of the closed door, there was privilege which amounted to comfort. Upon the other side of the door he was a creature of Fate ; here, beside his own hearth, within his own home, he was master of his destiny.

He pressed round and round the embracing walls, calling them "the cloisters of his life-song" in fond foolishness. He came to the window—sheets of plate ice running with rain—and whispered to it of its diamond shield, its crystal guard. Its transparency was but an accident of necessity ; it had oneness with the walls in their surround of fealty. He passed on from the window, his nails scratching across the glass, and again the walls were rough and masculine and sympathetic to his wet breast as he clung.

He reached the door. "*My friend !*" he articulated, as he twisted the useless knob in his fingers, and spread his other hand about the panels. "My friend. Best friend that ever man had. A knight in armour with naked sword, guarding me from the world. In the dark I can feel the flats of your armour. You must guard me more watchfully than ever now, for I am stricken. Let no one come in, for no one who would wish to pass is my friend. I have given no one the

password, but I will give it to you because a beautiful silver knight, whose crest is a halo, and who is stronger than you, despite your tried valour, will come to me soon. He will brush you aside as though you were no more than a door, an ordinary wooden door. He knows the password, although I did not give it him. Do not seek to stay him. Spring back to let him pass; it will be the last and greatest of your services to me. But let no one else pass, no one. Last night, when I was rich, I paid your hire again for a fortnight. It is more than enough. You know I'm stricken, don't you? I am burning with fire and running with ice. Let no one pass, no one. You have been good to me—good as God. The password is 'The End.' ”

He turned from the door and began to stumble towards his pallet of straw. He stumbled because it seemed that electric lights had been switched on, and he was in a hall of classic statues. The marble figures were placed close together about the floorspace, and he could see his bed in the middle of them. He climbed over the straining marble backs of “The Wrestlers,” and squeezed between “The Disc Thrower” and “The Slave” to get to his rest. “The Wingless Victory” was in his way. Impatiently he tried to shift it, but had to try another course, beside “Mercury Resting.”

He reached his bed at last, familiar yet strange bed, made from the straw in which the statues had been packed. He lay upon his back and looked up at the shell of the marble dome—high, high above him. The temple was not so big as he had at first thought. The dome was poised above a circle of slender columns.

He noticed that the veins in the marble were not veins, but crevices. The pillars were splitting; the dome was cracking; the whole temple was falling in upon him. It shimmered resplendent for a moment ere it broke inward and let the dome fall. It broke into millions of flowers, falling—not shards of marble, but lilies and passion-flowers, white roses and cream roses, falling, falling—falling. The blossoms as they fell changed to oval raindrops, shining with rainbow

gleam. And falling, the shower softened to dew so gentle that it could not harm, yet even then, before it touched him, it dissolved in perfume—perfume of old fragrance, the fragrance of slumber. He slept.

When Arnold woke the daylight was as sure as ever it was in that room at the bottom of a well. Sunlight fell glinting through the glistening panes. A dozen oblongs of it made a shining square on the bare boards, where it lay like the breastplate of the high priest of Israel.

He shivered. His macintosh lay about him frozenly and his hair was soaked, yet a burning thirst possessed him. A tin of water was by the fireplace. Having the will to fetch it, he discovered his weakness; he could not sit up; he could scarcely roll over towards the tin. He reached out his hand, but the water was still a foot away, and he was weak. He had only the floor to press against to make his way towards it, and every muscle was too puny to lift him to his knees.

He rested for a few minutes, then, heeling over, fell on his back toward the can. He could just touch the tin with his finger-tip. He caressed and fondled the tin with the points of his fingers while he rested. Whatever happened he must have the drink, but he did not want to get too far from the bed because of the difficulty of getting back to it.

He heard the front door slam; he supposed that it was someone coming in who had wakened him. He feebly cursed whoever it might have been that had done him this injury. He shuffled forward on his shoulder until he knew he grasped the tin. He clutched at it and the tin upset, spilling the priceless liquid over the greedy boards, which soaked it up. He moaned in his despair, rocking his head to and fro so that his skull knocked upon the boards. The hell in his throat threatened to consume him. His moans altered to dry sobs and then to puppy whimpering.

The door was thrust open, and he stared petrified at the woman who entered. His mouth worked feebly before he muttered, "Of course, of course, but I shall

see a good many things before it's all done with. Parrots flying round the room, devils and kings, and—— Tender God, how real she looks ! ”

The woman whom he saw was Bennetta Sard. As in amazement, she was leaning forward watching him with startled eyes. Then she stepped fully into the room and came swiftly towards him.

“ Poor boy, poor boy,” she kept repeating.

“ You have no right to be here, Mrs. de Valing.”

She started. “ I'm not Mrs. de Valing. I'm Bennetta Sard,” she said.

“ John Rockby told me you were going to marry, and that was a long time ago—ages and ages.”

“ I did tell Mr. Rockby that Mr. de Valing had asked me to marry him ; that he was waiting my answer, and that I should accept his proposal. But—when I saw him I couldn't do it. I couldn't consent, however much I wished to. I just couldn't do it.”

Arnold laughed. “ Why didn't you knock before you came in ? ” he asked.

“ Because I heard you weeping.” She was disengaging herself from her furs.

“ I never weep ! ” he said hotly. “ In a minute you will change to a devil with a big spike or a skeleton in chains of roses. Think I don't know what you are made of ? Shadowshine.”

“ You are delirious,” she said. She was stooping to a bag which she had put on the floor and was pulling out things—bottles of beef extract, eggs, and various tinned foods. She tumbled the tantalising food about near him, but not so near that he could touch it and convince himself of its unreality.

“ I know I'm delirious ; I should not be seeing you, of all people in the world, if I wasn't. I shouldn't see you stacking food at my side if I wasn't delirious.”

“ But I am real, Arnold. *It is me !* ”

“ Yes, yes, I know, and the bottle of milk and the arrowroot biscuits are real. Oh, yes, quite real. Only pull a few live rabbits and snakes out of the bag for a change ; I've got used to the food.”

She dropped all that was in her hands and came and knelt by him.

"Don't touch me!" he begged. "No, no, don't touch me!"

"Arnold, Arnold, I am *real*. You are soaked with water and shivering. Have my coat upon you." She leaned and dragged her furs across the floor.

"No, no, no! I am burning. Don't touch me. Go away. Go away—— *Ah!*" He finished in a scream. She was taking his macintosh from him, and he felt it leave him without his own aid. She wrapped him in a bundle, with her soft furs about him. He slipped wherever her movements rolled him.

As she patted the collar of fur round his throat her hand touched him. "You are *real!*" he whispered, and lost consciousness.

Bennetta felt him go limp in her arms, and she gazed wildly round the room. She looked at the bag with an impatient glance; she had forgotten to buy the very thing she needed—brandy. He was heavy—he was unnaturally heavy. The great alarm of the most terrible came to her. Was he dead? Had her unexpected appearance, coming when he was exhausted with hunger and sickness, killed him? She—had *she* killed him?

She leaned his head against her knee and tried beneath the furs to find his breast. She must get help. Instead she clasped him close to her, and kissed him over and over again. What was the need for help if he was dead?

White, bloodless white, his face was, and sharp and thin. All his limbs were relaxed; would they grow stiff soon? She must know. She must know if he was quite dead. She pulled him to the straw and laid him upon it. She flung aside the coat and lay beside him to listen for his heart. She could hear nothing.

She rushed into the passage and knocked upon the next door. A woman opened it to her. "I want help," said Bennetta. "I want help. There is a man in the next room very ill."

"He is always ill," said the woman.

"But he is dying now," urged Bennetta.

"There is always someone dying in that room. It's an unlucky room."

"You will come?"

"No."

"But I think he is dead," whispered Bennetta, frightened to say it.

"Oh, well, if he is dead he is dead," said the woman, and she shut the door.

Bennetta clenched her hands and ran back to the whitewashed room. She glanced at the recumbent figure which was in no way different; she felt for her purse in the bag and then sped up and into the street. It was noon, and she obtained brandy quickly and easily. When she came back to him he was as lifeless as before. She broke the bottle above a tin and forced him to take the spirit.

His eyelids fluttered, but he did not raise them. She gave him more of the brandy. She knew that she was weeping with relief when he began to breathe. "He wants warmth, he wants warmth," she said, and tried to imbue him with the warmth of her own heart, holding him close in her embrace, with furs about them both.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. He moved his hand and stroked her wrist. Then he sighed and closed his eyes again wearily. She placed him comfortably and rose.

"I'm going for a doctor. I won't be long," she said. "Can you wait patiently till I come back?"

He made no sign that he heard.

"I must go," she said, and glanced round before she went out.

When, some time later, she returned alone, he was gazing at the ceiling tranquilly, but an eager and excited expression came upon his face as she entered.

"You are to take everything as a matter of course," she said firmly. "The doctor will be here soon, and I'm not to excite you. I'm going to make a fire and warm the room. You must be quiet and not talk."

"What doctor?"

"One I have been for. I thought he would be here first." She had bundles of wood, and, under one arm, a

packet of firelighters. She carried a kettle, cups, and odd parcels.

He watched her build and blaze a fire. "There is some coal somewhere," he said. "I bought a bucketful on Wednesday. *Was it Wednesday?* "

"You mustn't talk; I've seen the coal."

"I know I mustn't talk; I'm going to get strong; but I want to know lots. How did you get here? How did you find me? "

"If I answer that, will you be satisfied and wait for the doctor? " She was putting bits of coal in a cairn above the fiery sticks.

"Yes, I will! "

"You gave a woman in Hyde Park your address on a piece of paper with my address on the other side. She wrote and told me you were starving. Now be quiet."

"But that is not a coincidence, and I believe in coincidences. That is perfectly natural."

"You promised. Be quiet."

"Yes, I will, but you're not going away again, are you? You'll stay till night and come again to-morrow? You won't——"

"I shall stay. I shall stay through the night and to-morrow and through the night until you can do without me."

"I can never do without you. I shall always want you. But what about your people if you stay with me? "

"Be quiet; I don't care a rap for anybody. You have got to get well."

"Yes, but——"

"I shall not answer."

"But one question only. Do——"

"Be quiet."

"Do you love me? "

"Yes, Arnold."

"Then kiss me quickly before he comes in. I love you, Bennetta. Bennetta! "

"I can't keep him quiet, doctor," she said, as the door opened. "I don't know where his temperature has got to now."

PART IV

APRIL

Chapter I

THERE had been opportunities for beauty in this room, and Arnold and Bennetta had taken advantage of them. The high, wide bay window curved outward in tall and narrow panes like a manifold screen of glass. The pattern was made by trailing lengths of Virginia creeper, hanging, sweeping against the glass; the wavering bars of a balcony followed with simple ornament the line of the lowest panels; two crooked plaster storks stood out on the platform, one curling its neck to a crock of breadcrumbs and the other, beak in air, gobbling a tinsel fish. London sparrows were for ever fluttering to and from the creeper and the crock of breadcrumbs. As often as one settled on the painted beak of the stork, so often Bennetta smiled. And as often as a new colour change ran swiftly down or spread slowly over the sky, so often Bennetta paused to watch it. If Arnold was with her, they linked arms and watched it together, not ceasing to congratulate themselves upon the idea of planting there two storks, which had turned a London window into a crystal Japanese screen, beautiful with fascinating variety. Bennetta had bought one stork and given it to Arnold; Arnold had bought the other stork and given it to Bennetta. His stork was called "Billy-willy" and hers was "Gwendoline"—both for no reason.

In the far corner was another screen, but of canvas, bought second-hand in Edgware Road, and painted over by them both. On it there was splendid Virginia creeper, sober sparrows, and two storks. The canvas screen had been strengthened, because upon the back

of it hung pots and pans, and it served to hide the gas-stove.

The fireplace was of white marble. It had once been swaddled in a mantel-boarder and drapery defined by a woollen pom-pom fringe. The Brookes rented the room furnished, so they were not allowed to discard any of the furniture ; but upon a night, black with intrigue, they had plotted. Previously they had declared, times innumerable, that they each wanted to scream whenever they glanced at the festooned horror of pleated damask.

"Let us scream *together* then," said Bennetta reasonably. "We are married. We stick together in this. At the word one we stand to attention ; two, we look at the mantel fringe ; three, and we scream ; the loudest wins. The one who loses finds an explanation to give Mrs. Triggs when she comes running in to see what can the matter be. I shall win ; I've seen more of it than you have."

"Come on, then," agreed Arnold, laying down his pipe. "One—wait. Wait a minute. If you are so jolly good at screaming, Ben, you scream and I'll set fire to the fringe, but don't scream till it's well alight, in case she has time to save it."

"But that's arson."

"Arson's nice," said Arnold, striking a match and starting a conflagration.

"I can't scream—Arnold—I can't scream. I didn't think you meant it. You'll have the house blazing in a minute, and——"

"See how prettily that blue flame licks along the pink folds. If the weaver could only get that colour in silk, what a rage it would have now. Don't you admire the——"

"Arnold, you silly Billy, I thought you were gaming."

"So I am, little woman. *Now* you can scream."

"I can't."

"Oh, Bennetta, and you promised ! She's coming up the stairs. Throw the things about and get excited. Fetch some water—bring a bucket—bring a bucket !"

Mrs. Triggs, who fancied she smelt something burning, rushed in and saved the situation by ripping down the flaming cloth and flinging it into the firegrate.

"You are like two children!" she snapped, wagging her finger at them. "You never ought to be left alone a minute. You were playing monkey-tricks. Don't you tell me it was a cinder. It wouldn't have been down at the two bottom corners and the middle top with nothing in between if it was a cinder. I suspected what you'd be up to when you said to me how *artistic* it was, how *choice*; was it me as picked the colours." The culprits stood close together. They feared that they had for once exhausted the great kindness of their landlady's heart, so was she shaking. And there was not that twinkle in her eye which usually abided while she chid them for their imperturbable youngness.

"You think I don't know what silly, silly children young married folk can be?" A quaver came into the voice of Mrs. Triggs, a quaver more of distress than anger. Her fingers twitched upon her breast, as if she hurried over a rosary. "Think I have not had children of my own grow up and marry and live in this very room, and—die in the hope of little children?"

"If I'd known that the fringe had such associations I'd have sooner done anthing than let it be destroyed," said Bennetta, making a step forward from her husband's side.

"I liked it," said Mrs. Triggs. "I can't help my likes and my dislikes. I'm very full and generous with my likes and my dislikes. I knew you would not like the mantel-border. Penelope, as I told you lived here, never liked it, so I knew you would not. You're like her in most things. She used to say things about the fringe, only put in a way so as not to hurt my feelings. She said them 'cause she'd got to say them, the same as you do. She was the only one of mine as was a girl. She used to say as the mantel-border was one of Roseytoe's poems, 'Hang it, the fur and purple dies,' and a lot more I can remember when I'm not upset. But I liked it, and she let it stop. Being my daughter,

she was like me—very full and generous with her likes and dislikes.”

“Don’t cry, Mrs. Triggs, don’t cry,” said Arnold, patting her hand. “We will get another fringe-thing the same as that.”

“I don’t want it. I ought to have let Penelope have her way at the time with it. I had not ought to have baulked her in anything, but I could not tell she would be gone so quick. You alter what you like in the room.”

“We don’t want to alter anything,” said the culprits in unison.

“I like the pictures,” continued Bennetta. “Only don’t be upset about it.”

“I like them as well,” added Arnold. “I like the one of Beerbohm Tree best.”

Oh, the print of Sir Herbert as Mephistopheles ! When Mrs. Triggs had gone two pairs of eyes turned straight towards it.

“You know, you said it,” said Bennetta.

“I know I did, but I had my fingers crossed.”

Therefore, although the white marble mantelpiece and marble hearth were restored to their pristine gloss and purity and splendour, the peculiar pictures continued on the walls, and antimacassars and tidies still draped the mahogany furniture. When the idea of letting two rooms occurred to Mrs. Triggs, that she might have company, her first movement had been to have the walls papered with “something cheerful.” Big greenhouse chrysanthemums—pink on a green ground—was what she selected. Both Bennetta and Arnold looked forward to the time when he could offer to repaper the room, but at the time of the restoration of the fireplace they had lived there only four months.

For four months Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Brooke had lived there. They had been married longer than that ; they had been married six months ; but the first two months had been spent by Arnold in a nursing-home, where he recovered from the effects of privations. He did not quibble with his conscience as to why he should

or should not marry Bennetta Sard. He knew that she was the love of his life, the one love, and he took from Fate this glorious, timely gift as he had taken all the untimely blows which Fate had dealt him, without questioning as to his deserts.

When the doctor had come to him in Bolsover Street he had arranged for his removal to the cleanly comfort and quiet of the nursing-home—a place of calm and forethought, healing the broken spirit as well as the worn body; where Arnold pressed a bell and his least wish (if good for him) was gratified; where he looked to the window and could see an apple-tree, of all lovely things in the world, an apple-tree in bud.

At first he did not see Bennetta often, and when he did he was silent and happy—too happy to care where the money came from which provided the luxury of living like an invalid when he knew of no complaint which he had. Nerves was not a complaint; everyone had nerves; and because he wanted to be strong now that he was happy he let the world roll rosily since it would, since it could. Afterwards, when he made enquiries, he was commanded not to worry about money matters. He knew that Bennetta had inherited money from her mother. How much that was he did not know.

One day (and the apple-blossom was on the tree) he noticed that she was wearing a dress vaguely familiar to him.

“When did you wear that before?” he asked. “I seem to remember it, Bennetta. Usually you wear the lavender one I like best, or the lavender one with the pattern. But I know that dress, dear. I know it ever so well.”

“I had it on when I came to your room in Bolsover Street.”

“Why haven’t you worn it since?”

“Because you like the others better.”

“I don’t know that I do, Bennetta, now that I see you wearing that. It’s simple, but I like it. Why didn’t you wear it again?”

"I—I thought the colour might depress you."

"That bunch of flowers—anemones, aren't they? De Caen?—are they real, or part of the dress?"

"They're real, Arnold dear." She loosened the wind-flowers, and moved tulips in a bowl of water to make room for them.

"I didn't think they could be real; anemones close so quickly, especially De Caen. They're always rather like paper flowers, carelessly made and a bit too brightly coloured to be real. Don't you think so, Bennetta? Bennetta, do you remember—do you remember painting anemones just the same as those when we used to sit on those little seats in the School of Art? You had a different bow in your hair that week. It was black silk, with the fire edge of selvedge left on one side. Do you remember? I'd forgotten that bow until I saw the lovely, clumsy flowers against your black dress."

"Yes, I remember. You thought I didn't know it was the selvedge."

"Bennetta."

"Yes, dear?"

"You're not sitting down beside me like you usually do."

"I was looking at the apple-blossom."

"Why do you make me work up so carefully to ask you why you are in mourning and why you were in mourning when you first came to me? Is it because it is someone who mattered terribly who died? Is it your father who is dead, Bennetta?"

"Yes."

"How long ago was it, Bennetta dearest?"

"Two or three months; I can't remember quite without a great deal of pain. He played all night in the music-room. My room was above it. I listened to him playing right on into the morning."

"Into the morning," murmured Arnold.

"He stopped in the middle of a note. 'Angels' Serenade' he was playing. I thought a string had snapped—but only for a second I thought that: it was his heart. You knew his heart was weak?"

"Bennetta."

"Yes, dearest?"

"Aren't you tired of looking at the apple-blossom? Will you come and sit beside me? I'm lonely with your loneliness."

"They'll not let me stay long to-day; I'm waiting for the bell to ring."

"You're not left quite alone in the world, are you, Bennetta?"

"No. I have you, Arnold. There are people besides, but they do not matter to me."

"Shall we really ever belong to one another, Bennetta? They've told me not to worry about anything, but I can't see how we can be married for years and years—and what can't happen in a year? Would you marry me to-morrow if we could see life clear before us—not any to-morrow, to-day's to-morrow, before the apple-blossom falls?"

"I will marry you to-morrow morning if you wish it, Arnold."

"Thank you, Bennetta."

They looked in silence at birds that were breaking open the blossoms.

"Bennetta, am I well again?"

"No, dear."

"Bennetta, am I going to die soon?"

"They keep telling me that you are not going to die. They tell me, every time I ask, that you will get better."

"Then why did you say to me, 'I will marry you to-morrow,' instead of 'I would,' and when you know there is no help for us yet?"

"Because you know how life comes down between us like a knife and cuts us apart from each other. Twice it has done it. I'm not afraid of death dividing us; it's life that makes me afraid of getting lost from you again. You're not afraid of death, are you, Arnold?"

"No, dear."

"Are you afraid of life?"

"I think I am a little. I know I am. Very easily I could be terrified by it—— Bennetta! Bennetta, in

the morning, in the morning will you marry me, before the knife comes down and cuts us apart again? Whatever is standing in the way, in the morning will—Why are you pressing the bell?”

“Oh, Arnold, I have undone half the good of your cure. In the morning, if the doctor permits, you shall have your wish, but rest quiet or I shall never forgive myself.”

They were married on the morrow by special licence in the little bedroom there, which was full of sunshine for the occasion. The doctor gave away Bennetta and the matron was the one witness. Apart from the apple-blossom tree and the bowl of tulips and anemones, the wedding was not floral. A tabby kitten, playing outside on the sunlit window-sill, was tapping at the pane, asking to be let in all through the ceremony. Arnold did not see Bennetta again for three days after she kissed him as a bride.

The quiet lull of his life in the rest-home was steadily musical, and more musical as peace and health returned to him in the following weeks, until the day when his wife came and took him away to bask for a week on a Kentish shore. All proposition for the future Bennetta left to her husband. She had now remaining little money—perhaps a hundred pounds or more—enough to take away the dread of winters if Arnold returned to his trade, as he was minded to.

“Birmingstow?” said Bennetta. “Do you want to get back there?”

“What’s in your own mind? There’s one advantage only that I can think of at the moment; I’m known as a good workman in several of the shops there, but against that there’s disadvantages all round for you.”

“You mean,” said Bennetta, “that I shall be meeting people constantly—people I know, who will expect me to live up to old associations, and we can’t afford it? I don’t want to pick up any of the old threads. What do you wish?”

“I don’t wish to divorce you from your friends, especially as I can offer only a tame sameness.”

"Being each so desirous of finding out what the other wants, we shall probably not find out what the other wants. Tell me, dear, do you want to go home to Birmingstow?"

"I wish never to see it again, never to hear its accent."

They returned to London and discovered Mrs. Triggs's house in Wolfe Gardens, which was near the builder's yard where Arnold obtained work.

With the exception of Mrs. Triggs's house and a private school, every house in Wolfe Gardens was given up to letting apartments. Mrs. Triggs was the widow of the man to whom the Fantail Laundry had belonged. She was considered to be "well off," not only as regarded her money, but also in respect to her widowhood. For Mr. Triggs had been ridden by a hobby which would have tried the gentlest woman. He had dabbled in mesmerism, spiritualism, the occult, and other things whose names Mrs. Triggs could not remember. Horoscopes was one of them. For horoscopic purposes he had built upon the roof of his house an observatory, known as the glass-room, since walls and domes were made of glass. Not only could one see the tokens of the night sky from it, but also great patches of London.

Possibly a less gentle woman than Mrs. Triggs would have broken her husband of his habits, but to herself she often said, "Well, it's better than drink." This she said at least once each supper-time, when her husband was making weird passes with his long hands above the cruet before her. On principle, she would never come under the influence of his will until she had finished her supper and sat still a few minutes for it to digest. Then she would close her eyes with a smothered yawn.

Mr. Triggs, satisfied that she was now completely under the influence of his will, without more ado would walk round the table and command her to perform such actions as fancy and a tender regard for his wife dictated to him—never alarming performances. Her part was easy, for he had learned that his will was not powerful enough to compel her to act unless he gave the spoken command.

Only once had she made a slip. He had told her to rest her feet on the footstool and to remain so while he washed up the supper-things. He had returned with the tray and found the broken stool scattered over the hearthrug.

"What did you smash your Christmas present for?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Jack; I thought you told me to twist the legs off the stool; only you mumble so when you're tired."

"Mumble when I'm tired? Hadn't you gone right off, or what was it?"

She made feint to recover. "I felt a bit drowsy and I thought you asked me to do something."

"Mm!"

The glass-room had been locked for several years when Arnold and Bennetta came to live in Wolfe Gardens. When Mr. Triggs had died, his married daughter, Penelope, returned to live with her mother. Penelope died in childbirth. Mrs. Triggs never ceased to lament that the child had not survived for her to cherish. She half decided to sell her home and live with one of her sons, all of whom had children, but she was loath to break away from her hall of recollection. She determined to make one venture for satisfying her special need and craving for someone whom she could mother. She placed a card upon the window-ledge in Wolfe Gardens, "APARTMENTS." It was this card which had attracted Arnold and Bennetta.

Chapter II

“ I HAVE been in Bluebeard’s chamber at last. And—here—is—the—key.” Bennetta swung the heavy key upon her extended forefingers. “ Dingle—dangle, what hangs over your head ; lady’s or gentleman’s property ? ”

“ Lady’s, since it belongs to Mrs. Triggs,” responded Arnold, scraping round the side of a pie-dish with a spoon. “ You know I *do* like pudding lots better when it’s caught at the side a bit. Isn’t it funny——” He broke off until the spoon was out of his mouth again. “ Isn’t it funny, the worse tasting the cheese is, the better it tastes cooked with macaroni ? When we had a tangy slice of cheese like this at home, mother used to smash it up in vinegar with a fork for me and call it mock crab. You don’t like crab, do you ? I don’t. It always strikes me as insincere. I imagine a——”

“ Hurry up with that dish, baby ; it’s the last thing I have to wash. And the key——”

“ Shan’t be a minute. There’s an exquisite shell of crisp brown along the side, but it’s tight. I wonder if it would be safe to eat macaroni cheese with a spoon in public, or if——”

“ What is wrong with you, Arnold, the last day or two ? ”

Bennetta patted her hands dry upon the cloth she had been using to wipe cups and saucers with, then she hung it on a corner of the little folding table reserved for the hand-bowl, and came to him for the pudding-dish.

Still scraping the sides of it, he allowed her to take it from him. “ Matter with me ? ” he exclaimed, with too much innocence.

“ Matter with you,” she insisted. “ I want the spoon as well ; it’s done with. Matter with you. You are

eating next to nothing, and yet you pretend to enjoy your meals. To-night you scarcely touched anything I'd prepared, and then, when I had cleared away, you began doting on the burnt side-of-the-dish."

"Doting? Was I doting? That's lovely, Well, it was only so that I shouldn't have to dry the cups and saucers while you washed them."

"That has nothing to do with it. Why don't you tell me what is troubling you, dearest? It isn't like you to neglect your food—you call it food, and I don't like the word; it reminds me of horses and Kipling."

"Kipling says 'feed.' Now I don't say 'take my feed,' do I?"

Bennetta finished putting away the crocks on shelves of the corner cupboard. She came and put her hand in his upturned palm and brought it to her shoulder as she knelt at his side, her head on his lap.

"Why do you fence off my concern, sweetheart?" she asked.

"Lovers always talk nonsense."

"Yes. I started the nonsense, because it's good to be young when one is young. But you've made it an excuse for not eating at the end of a day's work, when you must be needing something to keep you going. I know you *must* be worried about something which you'll not let me share; I know, because when you are asleep you talk."

Arnold snatched away his hand and sat upright. "What do I say! I mean, what do I talk about?"

"Food! Food! And that's why I can't bring myself to like the word."

Arnold laughed, and slipped his hand to its former place of caress. He began to rub the back of his hand along the curve of neck and shoulder, soothingly, intermittently. "Nightmare following on big suppers."

"Don't cheat."

"Sometimes I dream at nights. I think I'm in Bolsover Street. I expect I always shall have occasional dreams of it. It costs me an effort not to think of it when I'm awake, let alone then. Every night I have

at least one dream belonging all to Bolsover Street. There are others, and they begin beautifully, but in the middle or at the end I begin to feel hunger—*dream* that I feel hungry of course ; I'm not a bit hungry actually—then I dream that I twist a wire round me to stop the hunger pain, so that the dream can go on being beautiful. There's nothing the matter with me, but I feel the wire break off sometimes and bury itself deep in just here. See, just here, always just here. I want to scream out, but I daren't, because always I know you are close to me and it would frighten you if I called. Even when I'm asleep your love comes down to me, however deep my—sleep. When the scene changes too swiftly I cry out and frighten you. Now I've told you you mustn't be anxious again. You'll know that it is only a dream, Bennetta beloved—Bennetta beloved. It will go on coming to me again and again, but it will only be a dream—only a silly little dream that matters to nobody but me.”

“ My dearest, but is it a dream ? You are trembling, and your forehead is burning. You say the wire always breaks in the same place ; there—no, just there ? Oh, tell me everything. Tell me everything. Let my love come down to you while you are waking as well as when you are asleep.”

“ There isn't anything more to tell. It's only a dream which keeps coming ; my fancy, my imagination. I shouldn't have told you, but I was afraid of frightening you some night. You know how old people, when they dream, dream of the happy times when they were young. It's the same with me ; only now that I am young I dream of the unhappy times when I was old. Let us talk nonsense again.”

“ But——”

Arnold picked up the ponderous key from the corner of the table and said, “ Dingle-dangle, what hangs over your head ; lady's or gentleman's property ? ”

“ Gentleman's,” said Bennetta, submissive to his mood, yet patient of intent.

“ How is it a gentleman's ? ”

"Mrs. Triggs says you can use Bluebeard's chamber if you want to."

Bluebeard's chamber was the name given to the room of glass which the late Mr. Triggs had built above the roof of the house.

"What shall you use it for?" asked Arnold. "To dry the washing in on wet days?"

"I don't want to use it myself. For one thing, I couldn't climb up that iron ladder flat against the wall, not without some urgent prompting."

"What was the urging prompting to-day?"

"Curiosity. I wanted to see what it looked like."

"What was in it?"

"Nothing—but dust; it hasn't been used for years."

"What did it look like?"

"A *studio*!"

"O—h! I see what you are getting at, and again and always again I shall say, No! No! No, Mrs. Brooke, you married an artisan and not an artist. If you like to, I've no objection to you considering yourself the artist's widow, for Arnold Brooke, the artist, died of a broken palette-stick some time ago; but as the artist's wife, no!"

"Did I say I wanted you to take to art again?"

"Yes, you did—in woman's language. I can't speak it, but I can read it. Aren't you always impelling me toward art again, not knowing that when an artist dies, he dies? Art is not golf. And he would take some reviving, that artist, for there was a cremation, and the ashes scattered to the four winds of hell. Sorry. Aren't you always impelling me toward art? Nigh every Saturday you drag me to a picture exhibition by the scruff of my kindness, forgetting that people who are clever enough and content to criticise art are the people who could not create. Think of Birmingstow, Mrs. Brooke. Aren't you always getting me to talk art and to talk art and to talky, talky-talk art, forgetting that the people who talky-talk art are the ones who know blowall about it? Remember Birmingstow. Aren't you always——"

"Very well, then, Mr. Brooke; you, being in case armour, need not fear my puny attacks. Get a candle, and we will go and look at the studio."

"I shall not. It's no use kissing me; I shall stop where I am."

"Have it your own way, then. I will get the candle, and we will go and see Bluebeard's chamber."

"That's better; spoken like a woman." Arnold struck a match and lit the candle which Bennetta had brought from the bedroom. "Did you have much trouble in getting Mrs. Triggs to let you see the room?"

"None at all." I simply told her that my husband was really an artist—a landscape artist—only he had to work in the building trade as the fine arts were so unremunerative. She didn't show surprise, but——"

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Arnold, blowing out the candle-flame.

"Oh, Arnold, and we are short of matches."

"Don't matter; we shall not want the candle again."

"Why not?"

"I've been running up and down ladders painting spouting all day, and I don't think I could climb another rung. I don't think I could face that iron 'Jacob' up to the studio—er—blow!—Bluebeard's chamber, for wealth untold. I simply haven't the energy."

"I'm sorry, Arnold."

"And I'm tired, Bennetta."

"You wouldn't let me finish what I was saying about Mrs. Triggs. I ended by telling her that you'd decided never to paint another picture in your life, because it appeared that the labourer is worthy of his hire, but the artist is not."

"I suppose the subtlety of that was lost on Mrs. Triggs?" said Arnold, relighting the candle.

"I'm not quite sure; she said there were artists and artists."

"Bless her old heart, I begin to love that woman," said Arnold, with a chuckle. "But don't you feel it's too much for you to climb that awkward ladder again, dear?"

"You can help me. You're so big. There are wonderful views all round. I did so wish you were with me this afternoon to see them. You know that impulse to share which comes when you are looking at something which is so beautiful that it is intolerable. You feel that the thrill and joy is almost too much for one alone. You want someone appreciative with you, and then the joy is doubled and the beauty possible to bear. All lovely things make me wish that you were with me."

Arnold kissed Bennetta. They were walking up to the top landing. "If the beauty of anything moves me deeply," he said, "I too feel that longing to share, except in the case of music. Then I want no one to be near me, and no one to ever hear afterwards what I am listening to; often I hate the musician who is playing, because he seems to be robbing me while he gives, in that he is sharing what I want all for myself. Sometimes I think that music is the greatest of the arts because it is most like life, most like the essence of life. Both impinge against the soul; be beautiful while they are dreaded—those shuddery chords in 'Valse Triste'! I hate anyone who is near me while they are being played. I hate the music itself, and yet I want that part to be played over and over again. I dread, yet long to feel the hand which clasps and unclasps, and fumbles and feels about my heart while the music is being played. It's like life—like my life—that particular theme in 'Valse Triste.'"

They were standing at the foot of the iron ladder.

"Bennetta," he continued, "you've changed my mood. Don't let us talk nonsense any more to-night. I'll go first to open the trap-door and show the light. I'll reach my hand to you."

They stood together on the floor of the glass-room. "Shall I blow out the light?" said Arnold.

"We shall see well enough," said Bennetta, as she tweaked the candle-wick.

The sticks of the glass-room were so slight that it seemed they stood on a flat roof above the town. The raiment of the night was round them. Every stud

upon the wimple of the night sky glittered ; every string of gems that laced the nearer furbelows of the embroidered city shone ; its distant hem was powdered with seed pearls which glowed with a loveliness surpassing frills of fire.

" Was it even more beautiful by day ? " whispered Arnold.

" I can't tell ; you weren't with me then."

He put his arm round her shoulder, with the gentle roughness of the loverlike. They stood in silence, and let London be to them, as it has been to so many, a green countryside for witchery ; a mountain range in its challenge to quicken forlorn hopes ; a silent tarn for mystery, a desert in its crowded vastness—the prince of cities in itself.

" You have a fine name," said Bennetta, as if she had been engaged with thought and not entranced by the beauty of London.

" Were you addressing the city or me ? " asked Arnold.

" I meant you."

" You queer creature, what has my name got to do with all this fiery spider-web we are looking at ? "

" Nothing. I simply said I liked it as a name. Arnold—strong as an eagle ; Brooke—to bear."

He moved suspiciously. He had a great secret which he wished to keep from her, and he believed that she had either guessed it or was making it easy for him to tell her of it. Her words seemed to have no connection with anything but his secret, and why had she spoken them if she was not moving towards some point, tortuously, but swift ? The surest way to win confidence was to be the woman one loved ; therefore he supposed he would have to tell her.

" What made you say that ? " he asked, gruffly. " That I have been given a name which says that I am strong, but—strong to bear affliction ? "

" Nothing ; it came into my mind. I was looking through the back of the dictionary this morning for a name that went well with Brooke. That was all.

I rather like Aleck Brooke—one who helps men to bear.”

“Why did you look for a name?”

“We’re going to have a child, and it may be a son.”

“When?”

“April, perhaps. Aren’t you ready for my news?”

“Not a bit. I didn’t think of it yet.”

“Aren’t you glad?”

“*Glad!* Glad? It makes all the difference in the world,” exclaimed Arnold, about to behave fondly, but he stopped abruptly. “You shouldn’t have come up that iron ladder. You know Mrs. Triggs can’t climb it. You mustn’t come up here again.”

“Silly Billy,” laughed Bennetta. “I shall not come here again. But I did want to show you your studio.”

“I shall never need a studio, Bennetta.”

“It won’t be long before you start on new pictures.”

“Don’t ask me like that, dearest.”

“But you will begin to paint again soon, won’t you?”

“It would mean leaving you alone so much.”

“Then you have decided to start. I shall love to know that I am left alone for such a cause.”

“I can’t, Bennetta. There is so much that I have to take into consideration.”

“There’s nothing that I haven’t considered. Look at your view all round; could you ask for a better scene series than that? Always before you. No one but yourself will ever come up here.”

“It is coincidence; you know I believe in coincidences.”

“This is not coincidence; I searched half London for a place like this when we were house-hunting, and before, when you were in the nursing-home. Once, long ago, when we were happy before, if you remember, I told you that I too served art. I can’t create, but I can encourage, even if I can’t inspire. I can’t serve at the high altar, but I can trim the lamps. In this, my service to art, I am earnest as you were once in your service. Don’t let me also know what it is to fail. The organ-blower who can only serve by pulling a

lever up and down can be as earnest for art as the artist who is playing ; he who is pulling out the stops and striking the chords may be only winning fame ; working only for fame, and knowing no shame in it. To me that's just as despicable as using an art merely to get money, or respect, or friendships. Don't despise my claim ; art can't do without organ-blowers, Arnold. I don't want you to begin to paint just to please me ; I want you to start because you were made for that. You were born an artist."

" You wouldn't speak like that, Bennetta, if you had known what I have. You wouldn't speak slightly of the artist who wants a little fame, a little money, a little friendship, and all respect, if you had been as I have—outcast because I was an artist ; starved because, being an artist, I haven't the business instinct ; insulted by open gibe and covert sneer because I loved things which the people about me thought imbecilic. If men and women had smiled and giggled when they discovered that you considered yourself an artist, you would not grow bitter, grudging respect to the artist whom the mob do not understand although he understands them too well : you would hunger for a little respect ; you would want men to turn away their eyes whenever by accident they found that you were bleeding. I can't go back to art. I can only go on asking God to make me more and more like other men. See, all that I want, Bennetta, is just for you to love me and me to go on loving you ; to be able to keep my work and make a decent home for us ; and to have healthy little children who will not know if the sparrow is less beautiful than the wren. See, all that I want is to be like any other man who was born in a back street of Birmingstow—and I can't. I'm cursed ; I can refuse to touch a pencil and never create, but that doesn't stop me being an artist ; there's no second wind. Oh, beloved, don't help me with a single touch to stretch myself upon the altar—not now, just when I see how good it is to be just an ordinary working man, with a wife and a home and the hope of a son."

"I know, I know," said Bennetta. "The artist is given all beautiful feathers and no spurs, no talons, like the birds which are all beauty and cannot defend themselves. It's part of the scheme of nature. I know that we suffer by reason of the best in us. But you will not disappoint God. You were made an artist for some secret purpose of His ; you were born in a slum to interpret Him there. You will begin to paint again soon, Arnold, won't you ? "

He leaned against the window-ledge and passed his hand across his eyes, as if to sweep away the gloom and glitter of the entrancing night, that he might see in the round the full idea which was presenting itself vaguely before him.

Arnold Brooke knew that he was to die before April ; to die, moreover, a terrible death. He was feeding an internal cancer. He had been unable to tell Bennetta before this ; and now ! How could he tell her now ?

Was the history of his own birth going to be repeated ? His father had developed similar growth at such a time ; his mother's heart had not broken when she learned the truth ; she had not given way to melancholia, but Arnold had never known her smile, and her smile must have been a very sweet expression when she was young ; perhaps as sweet as Bennetta's smile. More tragic still, he had never but once known her weep. Was Bennetta also to go through the years without capacity to smile or weep again ; living frozen in love ?

And the child that was to be born in April, was it indeed to be his son in every particular of life as well as birth ? Was it to have his own childhood—the boy who could not play ; to have his own mockery of youth, his own early manhood which was like a great, bright-hearted rose growing at the end of a gaunt branch, and within the blossom and against it a clump of rose-gall living upon it ?

And for himself, Bennetta's husband, what ? In six months he would be dead, out of it, and the question not concerning him. Yes, but what about Bennetta

and the new Arnold Brooke that would lie in her lap? Would it be Arnold—strong to bear, or Aleck—helping others to bear? It would be Aleck if he could find means to hide his tragedy from Bennetta until after April. She would have to know in April, in the perilous time immediately after his son was born; but that way his son at least would be saved—be Aleck and not Arnold. That must be the way.

Which way? He had not found a way; he would be buried before the child was born. No! No, he would not! That was one thing he must get into his mind, clear and solid—a fixed thought to nail to. He would not die before the child was born; he would defy God and death till after then. He would brace himself in the strong will which his mother had given him and comfort himself with the patience in pain which he had inherited from his father. And love would help him—his love for Bennetta and Bennetta's love for him. *He would live till April.*

He had not advanced so far as this towards a solution before. He had thought wild, disastrous things—that he would desert Bennetta without explanation, trusting to her forgetting him in the years to be; desert her and die in some hole where he would not be found. How often during these last few days had he longed for that little, secret room in Bolsover Street. But he could not desert Bennetta, nor even take his life, without breaking her heart. One thing he would not do; he would not have operation after operation to delay and prolong the agony. If Bennetta discovered his secret she would insist on this delaying and delaying, and it would do no good. He knew that she would not weep; she would keep a little fantastic smile always ready for him when he should look at her, and then, afterwards, she would never have a smile for her baby, the child who could not play. She must not know. *He must live till April, and she must not know how.*

She must not know. How could he hide it from her? What was this nebulous idea which she had sent floating across his brain? Why would it not cool and harden

to the solid idea ? There was a way to hide his tragedy—as sure a way as if he were living alone in Bolsover Street. In an instant—if she did not speak to him—he would be able to print the idea on his mind. He wanted some way of escape, some plausible, natural way of escape from her presence when he could not bear the acute pain. He wanted some place to escape to, some place where none other, least of all she, could follow. Here was his sanctuary—the studio ! His excuse to escape was here ; art ! A big picture could be expected to take six months. He could leave Bennetta at any time, as often as the pain forced him from her side, saying that he was in the mood to paint. His *moods* ! His moods—they would come often. His moods ; what hells to bear, to bear alone ! Be strong to bear for sake of love : Arnold Brooke.

His daily work would have to be gone on with. In that, at any rate, he would not need to be a chaff-wax ; he did not care what the workmen thought. It was October now ; it was almost the winter season, when there would be no work for him to have.

“ You’re a long time answering me, Arnold,” said Bennetta quietly, at length.

“ It is a coincidence, Bennetta,” said Arnold. “ I could have found a way without coincidence, yet I will fall in with the fact that life is like life.”

“ You will begin on a picture soon ? ” asked Bennetta.

“ A rather ambitious picture, Bennetta. I will buy three or four canvases and work them one in with the others, according to the light and the weather. I will have the big one a night scene. I will get an easel and paints and everything I want on Saturday. You must not want to see any results before—Aleck is born. I want to do a big and ambitious piece of work.”

“ You have made me very happy, dearest,” said Bennetta. “ I don’t care if I never see your pictures ; there was another reason why I wanted you to return to art. It is because your life would be so very, very empty without it if anything goes wrong with me in April and you are left here—alone.”

Chapter III

“So,” said Arnold, wearily fastening the last button of his coat and pulling the collar of it straight, “it was foolish of me and idle to come to you, after my own doctor had taken me to a consulting physician who corroborated his opinion that I had a cancer?”

“I shall not agree with you quite,” said Dr. Pinfold. “You came to me, shall we say, not as clutching at a vain straw of hope that both were wrong, but, rather, you wanted me to verify the points which your first doctor made to fortify you? That is it, isn’t it? You didn’t come expecting me to give a different diagnosis?”

“You’re right, doctor; I wanted to be sure of my ground; and you verify all my first doctor’s statements.”

“Yes, I do, as you set them forth. You have made a clean breast of your intentions, and I agree—mind you, I am not speaking professionally in this—that no good purpose would be served by operations prolonging intermittently your sufferings. You *can* live till April; I verify that.”

“Your next special concern,” he went on. “Can you hide your disease from those in close association with you? You *could*. You could hide the fact that you were suffering from a malignant growth. Of course, later, it will be patent to anyone in my profession, but even your intimates need not recognise what the trouble is. The thing is internal, and you have the excuse of what is always a worrying time to account for you looking run down. I can answer for this; you *can* cover your disease; whether you *will* I do not know.”

The doctor was given to making a mental shrug, although it was never betrayed by more than an arresting of his facial expression, and, if he was standing, by

bringing his heels together, which took him a step back. He did it now, as if he had discovered that Arnold was emotionally an idiot, however he girt himself with his intelligence.

Arnold flicked his glance away from the doctor's direction as he answered, "If I can, and you say I can, I shall."

The doctor sat down, crossing his knees and resting his hands upon the round of his thigh, one hand upon the other. Arnold watched the broad hands, passive in their dormant courage and skill which was habit, habit which was skill. A doctor's hands are the most human things in creation. Arnold remembered the precise touch of them; the brusqueness which was compassion, the gentleness which was watchful care, the lack of tenderness which was tender. Idle, they were as any other quiet hands, unless there was a greater reticence in their indifference.

To the musician, his ear; to the artist, his eye; to the doctor, his finger-tips. Arnold, who had ever been grateful to his Creator for a body which recorded faithfully and instantly in his brain every sensation, degree, and shade of sensation, which touched or passed on to it, suspected how choice and rare must be the grave thrill of ecstasy sent to the brain of a doctor from his finger-tips when they touched in wisdom on the solution of a mystery which had intrigued their finesse.

The musician, when he drops his hands from striking the final chord of a new symphony and hears it ringing in his memory; the painter who lays the last petal of paint upon his picture and stands back to view it as a whole; the doctor who rests his responsive touch upon a responsiveness which is ready to cry out its secret to him; the three are artists one. Such difference as there is lies but in period—past, present, or future. Musician, painter, physician; for the ear, its artist; to sight, its artist; to the touch, its artist also.

Without interlude for rearrangement of things he was long prone to believe, Arnold had but one thought

as he looked at the broad, tranquil hands, and remembered that they were the understudies of the doctor's brain. "That readiness of my flesh to communicate vividly with my brain can do devil's work in the time that is coming to me—to me, an artist. An artist! And they call an artist an artist because of what he produces, and not because of what he feels."

Dr. Pinfold put his hand in his pocket as he said, "What you have felt so far is an intimation. You're not underestimating what you have to go through, nor overestimating your courage?"

Arnold shook his head. "I know it will be a terrible death especially for me, having dreaded it all my life. Before I was born the terribleness of such a fate was knit in with my nature; terror of cancer is part of my soul. I do not underestimate that; I know it will be terrible."

Dr. Pinfold was the least embarrassing of men; his eyes looked directly at a man who wished to meet his glance; but he looked elsewhere if the man was restive or churlish. Arnold kept his glance for a second longer as he asked with troubled uncertainty, "Shall I have pain continually, or will it be at intervals, as now?"

"Continually towards the end—the last two or three months."

"Thank you."

"Is your own doctor treating you to relieve you somewhat of pain?"

"He gives me morphia."

Dr. Pinfold pushed back his chair and stood up and opened the door for Arnold. His handshake was glowing and generous, although it was but a clasping and unclasping, without significant or noticeable pause. It was almost casual, yet it reminded Arnold that in all his years he had never made a friend.

"If I did have a friend, I don't expect I should know what to do with him; I'm just the boy who couldn't play grown up," he thought as he walked to Wolfe Gardens near by. He had chosen to go to a doctor

whose practice was so near his home so that a post-mortem enquiry should be avoided in the event of his death appearing to be too sudden to be natural. "Still, it must be one of the grand things of life to have a friend. What wouldn't it be worth to me to have a friend whom I could talk to at such a time as is coming—say a friend who is worse off than me, one who had something to face and hadn't any courage. It was ill enough to lack a playmate ; but, most said and done, a playmate for a boy is only someone to share his pleasures ; but later friendships as I saw them were stepping-stones across the Brook of Life where it is narrow and sparkling in youth. And now, when the river is widest, a friend—it's an often-spoken word so a tame word, but a friend would be someone you could put your arm to when the river is beating harder on him, or who would put his arm to you when you were taking the shocks. It must be one of the most wonderful things to have a friend like that—a man who could break your heart, but wouldn't ; a man whose heart you could break, but wouldn't.

"What wouldn't a friend mean to me 'twixt now and April ! I suppose there is a plan for the life of each of us, and there is a reason why there is no post, no lintel of friendship set down on mine. Now that I look at it, it is better that I have no friend. It would be someone else to be sad for me in April."

He took the house door key from his pocket and began to whistle as he put it in the keyhole. He hummed a song of golden-chain and lilac as he went up the stairs. Just before he opened the door of his sitting-room he let a smile grow restless on his face to as far as his eyes ; when he actually opened the door he forced his eyes to smile, in case Bennetta had returned early from shopping. Bennetta had not returned, and he ceased to sing softly of golden-chain and lilac and reserved the smile for another time.

He sat in the bay window. A newspaper lay upon the floor. It was a page of a Birmingham newspaper which Bennetta had bought. He did not stoop to pick it up,

but he leaned forward to look at the jumble of illustrations upon the open page. James Frankfort, the well-known Birmingstow artist, had presented a picture of Newn Street to the city. An old favourite of Arnold's had been taken down in the Art Gallery to make room for the latest addition. The newspaper reproduced the new picture. It was a clever picture. Arnold, casually though he looked at it, admitted that it was clever. Several influential and important citizens of Birmingstow filled up the foreground, their feet on the bottom of the frame, their top hats touching the top. It was clever ; anyone who knew Birmingstow at all could easily recognise all of them, and the bits of the famous thoroughfare between bent elbows and behind their ears : " Spy " himself could not have done the thing better.

Another successful Birmingstow artist was offering a picture and he had his photograph on the same page. He was seen at his easel, in his studio, holding a palette and brushes, and gazing upward. Arnold nodded to it and said, " There, but for the grace of God, go I, Arnold Brooke."

The sight of the photograph seemed to have cheered him a little. He put a cushion behind his head, and leaning back, looked to the sky as he let his mind go back to a thought he had touched and neglected as he walked home.

" I should say that there is a plan made out for the life of each of us. My plan ? Umph."

He stared at the sky for a long while, then he changed his position, stooped down where he sat, and after pulling his slippers towards him began to unlace his shoes. He stopped with the lace pulled forward, taut.

" That is the plan of my life. Let me go over it in different ways ; measure the job up different ways and see if it's the same each time."

" An artist does not paint a masterpiece by inspiration alone. First he has the talent, then he studies the work of the masters, then he works on small pictures and studies,

slight but good in their way. Then he has the inspiration when he is master of technique and so—a masterpiece. He proves himself artist. All his life has been preparation for that one painting.

“Let me keep to this A.B.C. simplicity and I shall trace the lines of what few men ever even see ; the plan of their lives.

“An author does not write a masterpiece by inspiration alone. First he is given the talent, then he reads and grows conversant with the masters, then he begins to turn out little poems, little stories, a long story, perhaps a novel ; all of them slight things comparatively : then he has the inspiration when he is master of technique and so—a masterpiece. He proves himself artist. From when he had the talent before he was born, all his life itself has been preparation for that one book.

“Sounds like instruction for writing nursery rhymes or how the five finger exercise was composed in a single night. Wait Arnold, you may be one of those artists who are only artists when they cease to attempt the artistic and—— Stick to the childish simplicity, you fool ! ”

“Some men are artists although they never paint a picture, sing a song, nor tell a story, never dance nor tune an instrument : they live their art instead. I am not one of those. Oh, wield the knotted knout. No !

“It’s slipping from me—but no ! A masterpiece ; a life of preparation, an artist. That’s it ; but the other way round.

“Stick to your nursery rhyme vocabulary. Every word rubbed off the dictionary is a chess piece taken by art from stupidity ; three syllable words are bishops ; four syl—— You are getting elaborate again. If you want to think as God thought when he drew your plan up, think in His limited language. He thinks in a vocabulary of one word ; ‘Love.’ Pretty ; but I don’t believe it. Anything to throw me off what I’m getting at. I’m too jaded to think. Come back to the A.B.C. effect.”

“I am an artist who has not made a masterpiece, yet

I am an artist. I shall never paint a masterpiece, nor is my life a masterpiece ; yet I am an artist."

"What then? My masterpiece will be the manner of my death."

"What then? Have I invented a new art, no, it is as old as—— Side track : go back to plan."

"The idea of my death is an inspiration."

"An artist does not create a masterpiece by inspiration alone."

"First he is given the talent. I was given the talent to die as I shall die. It was given me before I had proper eyes or ears to follow any other art. It was given me before I was born. It was made sure of in RUDYARD STREET."

"Next, he studies the work of a master. I had that privilege in CHAPEL GROVE. My mother lived on after she was dead because she knew subconsciously that someone whom she loved needed her."

"Next he practises his art, turning out a lesser work than which will content. Have I not turned out something to the credit of any genius of death. Was there not BOLSOVER STREET?"

"Comes the inspiration, now that I am the master of technique. And so—my masterpiece. I shall prove myself artist. Before I was born, and all my life was preparation for this one——"

The bootlace snapped.

He shuffled his boots off and eased his toes into his slippers. He listened, and went to open the door for Bennetta.

"Hello, Ben, tired?" he exclaimed. "What you brought for to-morrow's dinner? Looks like a bunny."

"'Tis a bunny. Not a bit tired. Shouldn't have gone if I was likely to be. Mrs. Triggs would have run twice round London if I wanted her to now that she knows for sure that she is going to have a baby to nurse. Still, sweetheart, I don't mind being back with you ; you have always got such a whimsical smile tucked away in your waistcoat pocket ready for when I come in."

"Ow, the bunny wabbit is sticky, it come through

the paper, Ow, ogh," said Arnold, who had taken the bag. "I've got an opera cloak for bunny's slim young shoulders." He picked up the newspaper which had prompted his thoughts, and dropped the rabbit into it.

"You have not read that yet, have you?" warned Bennetta.

"No, but it has served its spiritual purpose; it might as well now perform its utilitarian purposes."

"You are saying some peculiar things lately. What did you mean by saying that it had served its spiritual purpose?"

"I meant what I am always meaning; that I love my Bennetta, that I love my Bennetta. If I say that the sky looks green when you say it is blue; if I say the room is cold when you say it is hot, if I kiss your sleeve instead of your dear lips because I am afraid of the baby being born with a big red moustache like mine—it is red for my age, isn't it—Whatever I say, it only means one thing put in different ways, and that, I love my Bennetta, I love my Bennetta."

"I don't like to hear you talk like a mystic with a nervous breakdown, old boy, I don't. You are not looking well, either. Don't talk any more folly, Arnold; be a dear."

"Yes, a man is a fool who speaks wisdom which only he himself can comprehend."

Chapter IV

It was April. Nearly every house in London had capitulated to spring and bought a bunch of daffodils. Like besoms on which were twists of tissue paper from boxed oranges, dead daffodils remained in jam-jars on window-ledges of the slums. In suburban homes swelled bundles of double trumpets, seeking with greater pomp to compensate for not being in the first rush of beauty when the flowers came with rapturous newness to town. White narcissi, being slightly more expensive and fewer to the bunch, were in flats and rooms which contained glass vases to hold them. In West End mansions there was the flaming of roses and the hanging silver vinaigrettes of white lilac—but all that was quite a different thing to the daffodils spread up and down London in rooms which they made strangely disturbing with their winsomeness, and in otherwise evil rooms which they mocked instead of brightening. It was April. It was April, and the city, faithful to her secret faith in ideals, tried to buy—to grasp—a little reality of the unreality of spring by buying daffodils.

There was a mystic once—he was also a poet—and on an April he watched London make endeavour to grasp the fugitive transience of spring by buying narcissi. He had a little song to write. He was limited to eight lines, as the song was only to fill in a space at the bottom of an article on railways. He had but one day to write it in, as the magazine went to Press on the morrow. He had sixpence in his pocket, and was so hungry that his soul could not find voice to sing the little song to order. He had sixpence in his pocket; he could do one of three things—could eat and get strength enough

for eight lines ; he could buy cigarettes and so disperse his hunger and get solace enough for eight lines ; he could buy a bundle of daffodils and get inspiration sufficient for eight lines and a title. He bought the flowers. He had not a room to take them to, but he knew of a dark corner under Adelphi Arches where he used to hide and wait to see the face of a great playwright who let himself in and out of a doorway there. The mystic, who was young and feeble, took the daffodils there. In the under-tower-of-London gloom and mystery of the arches he put the flowers in a corner, stood them up against the stonework, and knelt to regard them. He ran his fingers up the shining stems, which caught the light where they were fluted. Eight short lines. He put his face right among the flowers, and let their water-spots be tears upon his cheeks and lips. He breathed their scent, faint but sacred. He tried to sing his little eight-lined song. He could not. *He could not.* He could not sing ; he had touched the flowers, and they had ceased to be illusive. They were his ; they belonged to him, to crush or to keep ; they were something concrete. When he had beheld them first they were as inexplicable as spring itself ; now that he owned them and felt their substance they were nothing but yellow flowers—nothing but a waste of money.

And so it was with London. She saw the miracle in spring seeming impossible even while it was telling its romance in its opening chapters. She tried to grasp its wayword spirit by snatching at its semblance, found the things she held were concrete, and doubted if the spring itself was wonderful, even while it told its romance in its opening days.

And so it was with Arnold.

It was April, and still he lived. When first the idea of living secretly his tragedy had come to him, it seemed only possible for him to live his secret struggle by a miracle ; it seemed that the miracle would be as inexplicable as the miracle of spring. Now that it was April and he had achieved his purpose, he looked back and

doubted if his achievement was in anything approaching a masterpiece. It had been a display of physical endurance ; a prolonged and fearful effort ; terrible—yes, it had been terrible, but now that it was the end, and there could not be many more minutes of life left to him, it did not seem to prove that he was an artist. And in hundreds of shabby rooms in London there were people wondering why they had spent sixpence on daffodils which now were ready to be thrown away.

He dragged his limbs round the studio, finding the pen in one place, the ink in another, and the paper—oh, there was paper on the table beside the camp bed.

He sprawled on the bed, and tilted the table to serve as a desk. The ink would not flow from the pen in that position. He rolled up and half lay on the table to write his only love-letter—the first ; the last.

It would not matter how he wrote so long as he got it done and made things plain enough.

“ *April, 1912.*

“ BENNETTA BELOVED,—Dr. Pinfold will explain everything and avoid a post-mortem.

“ Bennetta, you have been the only one to love me or be loved by me with the exception of my mother.

“ I do not know how you and the son will live, or what you will live on, but that does not mean I do not love you. I do love you, only there are no words that mean much which will come to me. Perhaps I shall be able to tell you when we meet.

“ Your loving husband,

“ ARNOLD.”

He pushed the ink to the side of the wall in case he should not lie still and so spill it. But he lay still.

The room was bright, very bright, with sunshine. In the corner farthest from his bed were the canvases, the easel, the paint-boxes and tools of his forgone art. They had not been unwrapped from the paper or packing in which they had been bought.

He remained very still. The light began to falter, as

if afraid to leave him to himself, but yet afraid to stay. He would have chosen to die in the sunlight, but it could not be helped. An hour passed.

Although it was still light in the studio, in the lower portion of the house the hint of darkness told of evening, and each aspect of each room looked like a soiled print.

Mrs. Triggs lit the gas in the room where the infant nestled on Bennetta's breast. Mrs. Triggs was the most motherly of all her sex—the mother sex. When her children had grown up she did not cease to mother them. When they married and left her roof she mothered her husband, and when he too had left from beneath her roof, Penelope had possessed her life. Penelope, so soon to go, should have warned her not to give devotion quite so absolute to any earthborn again. But in the few weeks prior to Arnold's and Bennetta's advent into Wolfe Gardens she had often watched from her window the children playing in the square, seeing in them her own little children again. She had decided not to go to the home of any one of her sons, because she mothered them all so desperately in her heart that she could not decide which ones to neglect for a favourite, and they all had children, and none of them really needed her. She had held out her heart to Bennetta as soon as she saw her, and Bennetta had gone into that stronghold of motherly love and had pulled the door to quietly after her.

Bennetta had wanted to be there so much from the moment she saw the soft-lined face, with its entreating yet assuring eyes. Bennetta had wanted, not only affection, but also the advice of a woman who had once been poor and “had to make both ends meet,” and she had laid herself open to Mrs. Triggs's unstinted motherliness, and had found it something like a warm June day. It was with contented amusement that she observed Mrs. Triggs show signs that she regarded the child coming to the house as belonging to her rather than Bennetta.

Mrs. Triggs had a power by which she was wont to refresh herself. Under stress of great emotion, great happiness, or great woe, she could cry in absolute silence,

so that no one could know unless they looked very closely at her. She was weeping thus now as she lit the gas and lowered the blinds. Bennetta's doctor, Dr. Rainsford, was also in the room, seated by the bed. The child was nigh on three hours old, but he still stayed.

"Mother," said Bennetta, with quietness.

"Yes, poor lamb," said Mrs. Triggs.

"You may take my son now."

"He is my sonny, is he, now?" asked the woman with the great heart.

"Be good to him when I cannot have him," said Bennetta.

"He shall always be the first thought in my heart."

Bennetta smiled. "Hold him for me to kiss, mother."

Mrs. Triggs closed her eyes when she had lowered the morsel of life to his mother's lips. It might have been jealousy that caused the expression on her face; it was not.

Bennetta, without turning her head, said, when the infant had been carried from the room, "Doctor, I want to see my husband."

Dr. Rainsford did not rise. He leaned forward and laid his fingers on the slow pulse while he slipped his watch from his pocket.

"Will you bring him to me now?"

"I had better wait until Mrs. Triggs is with you."

"Will you bring my husband? I want to see him now, doctor."

"I think it would be better if Mrs. Triggs was with you."

"Call him from the doorway. He will come."

"I don't think so. I expect that I shall have to go up to the studio for him. I called him at the foot of the ladder a quarter of an hour ago and he did not answer. I expect he was sleeping."

"Yes, he must be tired out. He was up all night. He must have fallen into a dead sleep. Will you go up the ladder to him? He will come if you tell him I need him. Say 'Bennetta needs you.'"

"I don't wish you to be alone, that is all."

"Doctor."

"Yes?"

"I am growing frightened."

"I will go for him now."

"You will leave us alone together when he comes, doctor?"

"Yes—when he comes."

She turned her eyes towards the door. It was a white enamelled door turned to ivory. The paper surrounding it was fair with pale roses. She heard scarcely any sound. She told herself that it was the waiting to see his dear face which made the waiting seem so long.

She listened so intently for any sound that she heard bells ringing and no actual sound, even as one who stares intently in a dim light sees many golden specks but no real image.

The door began to open slowly—oh, so dreadfully slowly. Surely she had not lost sense of time? It opened a little way and was still; it opened further and was still; it was wide open, and no one passed. What were they bringing in to need the door so widely open? Not a tray. She didn't want anything or anyone but her husband. Him she wanted, only to let him know how much she loved him. The door remained still.

He entered. He was leaning against the wall, and glided as if he slipped. His head was surrounded by the pale pattern of roses. His hands hung palm outward, and swung without rhythm.

"Arnold."

He smiled; for the first time he had forgotten to smile before he came to her.

"You look strange. You look like your own spirit."

"Am I so—so—I have forgotten the word."

"Come closer, Arnold. There is a stain on your lips."

"Paint, off a brush."

"Won't you come to me, Arnold? Won't you come to me?"

"I mustn't come. I didn't think they would let you see me twice to-day, dearest Bennetta."

"To me—Bennetta. Won't you come and touch me?"

"I can't, Bennetta."

"But the tears are running down your face and you don't know what you are doing."

"I can't, Bennetta."

"They have told you then. And I begged of them to let me tell you myself."

"They have told me nothing. He said you needed me."

"Then why do you look like that? You have always such a beautiful face for a man's; but it hurts me now. And why are you still smiling?"

"You frightened me a little. He said I must come. He said I might stay. I don't understand. Is the sonny dead?"

"No, he's in the next room, bonny, Arnold," she said. "Arnold, come and put your head beside me on the pillow and be close to me, because I want you to be very close to me while I am dying. I might not be able to speak more than a whisper soon, and I want the last thing I say to be 'I love you, Arnold,' and I want you to hear me say it."

Startled beyond the knowledge of his own mortal pain, he looked at Bennetta. He looked round the room, as if for explanation from the walls. Upon a side-table was a small bell. He flung out his hand and struck it.

Dr. Rainsford came into the room.

"Is it true?" asked Arnold.

"Quite true. Everything possible has been done."

"Will you help me to the bed? I am not the man I was."

The doctor consented by complying.

"You will leave us alone together?" asked Arnold.

"Right until nothing matters? Thank you. Will you unloose the plaiting of my wife's hair?"

Arnold laid his head within the torrent of unwoven curls. The door closed softly.

"You are not to worry, Arnold."

"You are a good woman, Bennetta."

"You are all a man should be, beloved. Will you kiss me and tell me that God is good to us? For He is good to me."

"God is very, very good to me, Bennetta. How good you will not know for a little while, but you will see into my heart soon. You will see also how much I love you."

Bennetta stirred.

"I love you, Arnold," she whispered.

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